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Security Council

Seventy-first year

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New York

President:	Mr. Wu Haitao	(China)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Casimiro
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	Japan	Mr. Takeda
	Malaysia	Mr. Abdul Razak
	New Zealand	Mr. Walbridge
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
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	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Maguire
	United States of America	Mr. Wagner
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Arcia Vivas

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than four minutes in order to enable the Security Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate their texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber. I would appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a reasonable speed so that interpretation may be provided accurately.

I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Mr. De Aguiar Patriota (Brazil): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this important open debate today. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing and to acknowledge the statements made by the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine.

After five years of protracted hostilities and human suffering, it is heartening to acknowledge that the cessation of hostilities in Syria is creating the conditions for a gradual advance towards stabilization and peace. There has been an overall decrease in casualties since February. Important cities such as Palmyra are no longer controlled by the self-proclaimed Islamic State. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports a positive trend with respect to humanitarian access. Besieged or isolated areas are being reached for the first time in years.

Nevertheless, growing violations reported by both sides to the conflict in recent weeks may threaten the significant progress that has been made. We call on the parties to fully respect the cessation of hostilities. We should spare no effort in working towards a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition aimed at establishing credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance, drafting a new constitution and ending the war, as established by resolution 2254 (2015).

In that regard, we welcome the new round of intra-Syrian negotiations launched last week in Geneva under the auspices of the United Nations and with the assistance of the International Syria Support Group. Brazil reaffirms its steadfast support for the efforts of Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and those of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, led by Mr. Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro.

But we are also concerned about the negative humanitarian impact of unilateral sanctions on Syria. As a study commissioned by a group of experts recently confirmed, unilateral economic and trade measures often create insurmountable practical barriers to the work of humanitarian organizations attempting to deliver food, medicine, fuel and other essential items to civilians affected by the conflict. The sanctions also hinder the establishment of conditions conducive to refugees' safe and voluntary return to Syria, thereby exacerbating the massive displacement crisis currently affecting many Middle Eastern and European societies. Lastly, they obstruct key initiatives aimed at restoring and rebuilding Syria's economy and infrastructure.

It is worth recalling that the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, set up by the Human Rights Council, has spoken out against such sanctions. Brazil has long held that unilateral sanctions are counterproductive and incompatible with international law. The Security Council is the only body with a clear legal mandate to impose coercive economic measures, and I would like to recall here that, in its resolution 70/185, the General Assembly states clearly that unilateral coercive economic measures constitute a flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and contravene the basic principles of the multilateral trading system.

The absence of any positive signs of concrete developments on the question of Palestine is alarming. The peace process remains stalled, acts of violence continue to occur and we are witnessing disrespect for the principle of due process of law, leading to more violence. Illegal settlements, demolitions and land expropriations proliferate in the West Bank, and the humanitarian situation remains dire, particularly in Gaza. If left unchanged, this intolerable status quo will continue to destabilize the Middle East and erode the credibility of the Security Council. Brazil expects the Council to live up to its responsibilities by acting decisively to establish parameters for the end of the occupation. The only viable solution remains a Palestinian State that is fully sovereign, economically sustainable and territorially contiguous, with borders based on the internationally recognized 1967 lines, living in peace and security with Israel. In that regard, we are following with interest the initiative of holding an international conference aimed at garnering broad support for the peace process, as proposed by France. Reports of a draft resolution that would require Israel

to freeze the construction of settlements and set a time frame for arriving at a two-State solution are also encouraging.

Concerning Yemen, the cessation of hostilities initiated last week and the resumption of peace negotiations in Kuwait under the auspices of Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, are a much-needed step towards ending a conflict that has left innocent civilians unprotected and exposed them to many extreme forms of strife. As reported by international human-rights organizations, air strikes have repeatedly hit protected areas such as hospitals, as well as populated regions. A particularly grave incident was the bombing of a market in Mastaba, which killed at least 97 civilians, including 25 children. We call on all parties to fulfil their obligation to respect international humanitarian and human-rights law, including the fundamental rules of distinction, proportionality and precaution. Brazil continues to uphold the imperative of a sustainable and inclusive political solution to the Yemeni crisis achieved through non-military means.

While Libya remains deeply unstable, recent developments suggest that a measure of progress has been made towards solving the country's significant political and security challenges. We welcome the arrival in Tripoli of the Presidency Council of the Government of National Accord, endorsed by resolution 2259 (2015), as well as reports that it has already consolidated authority over key ministries and State institutions. Brazil reiterates its support for Special Representative Martin Kobler and urges all the parties to work to restore peace and national unity in Libya.

As a general thought, and in line with the overall template that underpins the three reports submitted in 2015 on peace operations (S/2015/682), sustaining peace (S/2015/560) and on women and peace and security (S/2015/716), the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, should privilege and revitalize preventive measures and diplomatic efforts to solve disputes through peaceful means, especially those in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Vale de Almeida: I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU).

The ongoing crisis in Syria, including the connected spread of Da'esh, poses an existential threat to the Syrian people. The consequences are also particularly felt by its neighbours and the wider region, and in Europe itself as well. If we want to tackle this threat, we must first intensify our joint efforts to put an end to the war in Syria by arriving at a political solution within the framework of the 2012 Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015). Secondly, we must all join forces against Da'esh in an even more effective way.

The European Union is an active member of the International Syria Support Group and its two task forces, on humanitarian access and a cessation of hostilities, and fully supports the efforts of Staffan de Mistura, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General. There is no alternative to the intra-Syrian talks being conducted under the aegis of the United Nations if we are to reach the goal of a political settlement. We expect all Syrian parties and their backers to engage in the process. In particular, we encourage the Syrian regime to engage in good faith and to address the substantive aspects of a political transition.

In that context, the EU emphasizes the importance of four key elements agreed on by the International Syria Support Group and endorsed by Security Council resolutions. First is the consolidation and expansion of the cessation of hostilities. It is incumbent upon all parties to respect the agreement of 27 February. Secondly, there is the consolidation and expansion of humanitarian access, especially to besieged and still hard-to-reach areas. The Al-Assad regime has a particular responsibility in that regard, since a clear majority of the besieged areas are under its control. Thirdly, there is the release of arbitrarily detained persons, particularly women and children. Fourthly and, I would say, extremely important, is embarking upon a political transition, without delay and with the intention of reaching a lasting solution.

As we have stressed in the past, the Middle East peace process remains vital not only for those directly affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also for the stability of the wider region and thereby also for the European Union. Despite current challenges on the ground, the EU remains united in its commitment to achieving a two-State solution based on the parameters set out in the Council's conclusions of July 2014. We reiterate that there is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution, which remains the only realistic way of

ending the conflict to the main benefit of both Israelis and Palestinians. Regrettably, those populations are now adversely affected by the recent violence, which is taking a terrible human toll and further undermining trust on both sides.

The EU has taken a clear stance and condemned acts of terror and violence against innocent civilians from all sides. In January, our Foreign Affairs Council also urged all sides to refrain from actions that could fuel further tension by way of incitement and provocation, while adhering to the principles of necessity and proportionality in the use of force. We also recognize the special significance of holy sites and urge all to uphold the status quo for the Temple Mount, Al-Haram Al-Sharif. However, we remain convinced that security and short-term measures alone are no substitute for sustainable political solutions. Only significant policy shifts on the ground and the re-establishment of a political horizon can end the violence, rebuild trust and pave the way for meaningful negotiations on the outstanding issues. In that context, it is vital to ensure that all international initiatives are directed towards that goal.

The EU will play a leading part, not least through the its Special Representative for the Middle East peace process and the Quartet, which is currently drafting a report on the dangers of the current trajectory with significant recommendations on the best way to advance a two-State solution. In that context, the European Union also welcomes other initiatives in the international arena, such as the international peace conference proposed by France, as one part of a broader and coordinated effort to preserve and strengthen the two-State solution.

The role of regional partners remains essential. The Arab Peace Initiative could serve as an important pillar of any future comprehensive peace agreement, while it also provides an opportunity for building a regional security framework. The Security Council has an obvious and crucial role in that context. We take this opportunity to offer our full support to the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, Mr. Mladenov. The EU believes that an integrated approach among international stakeholders can help revive the Middle East peace process. We look forward to working closely with partners in the months ahead towards that common goal. The power to change the situation is obviously primarily in the hands of local leaders and societies. The support and active participation of both sides of the conflict remain a crucial prerequisite for the success of any peace initiative.

Both sides will need to demonstrate through policies and actions that they are genuinely committed to the two-State solution. They must end all actions that undermine the viability of the two-State solution. The EU is highly concerned by the ongoing erosion of the viability of a two State-solution. In that context, we reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. As it has consistently reaffirmed in its Council conclusions, and most recently in January 2016, the EU is strongly opposed to Israel's settlement policy and to actions taken in that context, such as the recent increase in demolitions, including those of EU and EU-member States' funded projects in Area C, the declaration of private land as State land, the legalization of unauthorized outposts and confiscations, as well as the forced transfers of people. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States.

By the same token, jointly addressing the needs of the Palestinian population should be a top priority for Palestinian political leaders. We therefore urge Palestinian factions to bring ongoing reconciliation efforts to a rapid and successful conclusion, on the basis of democracy and the principles of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Palestinian unity and accountable and democratic Palestinian institutions will be crucial in establishing a viable Palestinian State. We welcome the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, the main mechanism for aid management and donor coordination, being held in Brussels today and tomorrow in the presence of the two parties. Its role is to underpin political efforts to achieve a two-State solution by supporting the development of institutions in preparation for Palestinian statehood.

There must also be accelerated efforts to address the dire situation in Gaza. While the EU has delivered on all its pledges made at the Cairo Conference in 2014, we urge all others to follow suit. Increased access to Gaza through legal crossings would also contribute to an improved situation in accordance with resolution 1860 (2009).

Let me end by noting that, in our view, the forthcoming Quartet report should be the basis to set out in more detail the concrete steps that both sides must take to recreate the political horizon for a two-State solution with the full support of the international community.

Together, we need to find ways to prevent further disasters in the Middle East mainly for humanitarian reasons, but also because despair can breed radicalization and further violence. Together with international partners, and hopefully with crucial input by the core parties to the conflict, the European Union will continue its concerted efforts to prevent the further escalation of violence and defend the viability of the two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Lebanon.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): Since the beginning of 2016, according to official United Nations statistics — let me underline that those are official United Nations statistics, not drawn from any Palestinian or Arab source — the Israeli authorities have demolished 539 so-called structures in Area C of the occupied Palestinian territory, as compared to a total of 453 for all of 2015. Similarly, since the beginning of this year, 805 Palestinians have been displaced as a result of the demolition of their homes, as compared to a total of 580 for all of 2015. In fact, statistics from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs show that from 50 demolitions per month in the period from 2012 to 2015, the average has risen to 165 per month since January 2016, with 235 demolitions in February alone. To put those figures into context, let me also recall that, since September 2000, Israel has been responsible for the killing of more than 9,300 Palestinian civilians, including 2,100 children, and for the injury of more than 87,000 persons. Moreover, since 1967, Israel has been responsible for the demolition of 28,000 Palestinian homes.

Those facts are a clear reminder that Israel, the occupying Power, has not only failed to meet its primary responsibility under the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect Palestinian civilians, but, on the contrary, has been pursuing a deliberate and continuous policy of strangulation against Palestinian civilians in total disrespect for their lives and basic rights, with the aim of perpetuating and consolidating its illegal occupation of their territory. After nearly five decades of daily violations of their basic fundamental rights — including, among others, countless arbitrary arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings and torture — and after almost five decades of confiscation of their private property, the demolition of their homes and forcible displacement, the least that the Palestinians of the occupied territories, in both the West Bank and Gaza, can expect from the Council, which under the Charter of the United Nations is entrusted with the maintenance of peace and security, is that, pending successfully ending the long-standing Israeli occupation, it takes all the necessary measures to ensure their protection, both as individuals and as a people, including stopping all forms of settlement activities on their land.

Let me now turn to the Syrian crisis. Last February's agreement on a cessation of hostilities has given Syria and its people a glimmer of hope that a settlement of the conflict has become a realistic possibility. We take this opportunity to commend Special Envoy De Mistura for the tremendous effort and time he has deployed to set the conditions for the achievement of the cessation of hostilities, guided by the work of the International Syria Support Group. We also recognize the leadership of the co-Chairs of the ceasefire task force, the Russian Federation and the United States, in supporting the cessation of hostilities, which resulted in a significant reduction in the number of civilian casualties and cleared the path for the resumption of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva, which, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, should lead to the achievement of a lasting political solution that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people to live in peace and dignity in a sovereign and unified country. Only such a solution could turn the present cessation of hostilities into sustainable civil peace by allowing the Syrian people to begin the long and arduous task of national reconciliation and reconstruction and paving the way for the return of Syrian refugees and displaced persons to their homes and livelihoods.

Having said that, until the eventual return of the 1.2 million Syrian refugees currently residing in Lebanon, we continue to reiterate our call to the international community to meet its pledges and to provide Lebanon with the necessary means to deal with that massive responsibility. Only adequate assistance that integrates humanitarian and developmental funding can enable Lebanon to provide for the needs of the refugees and offset some of the negative impacts that the protracted humanitarian crisis has left on my

country's economic growth and unemployment levels and the pressure on our infrastructure in the education, health, energy, water, sanitation and housing sectors.

It was just last month that my country was privileged to welcome the joint visit by the Secretary-General, the President of the World Bank and the President of the Islamic Development Bank. It was an important occasion for them to assess such needs at first hand. Five years into the conflict in Syria and after multiple donors conferences, in particular the one held in London in February, it is crucial to establish a follow-up mechanism to those conferences. In our statement before the General Assembly on 20 November 2015 (see A/70/PV.59), we detailed our proposal regarding such a mechanism to enable follow-up with donors regarding the fulfilment of their pledges. Today, we reiterate our call for such action.

For Lebanon, the joint visit also provided a significant message of international support and solidarity to help it maintain stability and security. In that context, my Government has stressed the need to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) and to put an end to Israeli violations of my country's sovereignty by land, air and sea. We would also like to point out that paragraph 10 of resolution 1701 (2006) requests the Secretary General

> "to develop, in liaison with relevant international actors and the concerned parties, proposals ... for the delineation of the international borders of Lebanon, especially in those areas where the border is disputed or uncertain".

We also recall that, among the chief purposes of the United Nations, as stated in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations, is

> "to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace".

My Government has also sought the good offices of the Secretary-General in the delineation of the disputed maritime border and the exclusive economic zone between Lebanon and Israel, emphasizing that the non-resolution of the issue would remain a source of conflict that threatens peace and security in our region.

Let me conclude by going back to where I started in order to stress again the urgent need for the Council to put an end to the settlement activities in the occupied State of Palestine and to provide international protection to the Palestinians living under occupation. A failure to do so would not only constitute a moral and political abdication, it would amount to granting Israel permission to continue its blatant violation of the numerous resolutions of the Council and the General Assembly on the question of Palestine, let alone the principles enshrined in the Charter and the rules of international law. In fact, the Council's failure to live up to its responsibilities made it possible for Mr. Netanyahu to declare on Saturday,

> "It's time that the international community finally recognizes that the Golan will forever remain under Israeli sovereignty."

Is it not, rather, time for the international community, represented by the Council, to remind Mr. Netanyahu of Israel's obligations under resolution 497 (1981), which reaffirms the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and to condemn his declaration in the strongest possible terms?

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al-Mouallimi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me once again to express to the President our appreciation for his wise leadership of the Security Council during this month and to wish you every success. I also wish to thank you for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East. Allow me also to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning.

It is also my pleasure to refer to the important statement delivered by His Excellency the President of the People's Republic of China before the Council of the League of Arab States at the beginning of the year, on 21 January, when he specifically called again for an end to the historical injustice done to the Palestinian people, referring also to the need to enable that people to exercise their right to establish their own sovereign Palestinian State, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We wish to express our appreciation for all the efforts by friendly China and for the President's efforts in that regard.

We meet today once again as Israel pursues its aggressive terrorist practices as well as its grave violations of international law. Israel persists in challenging international legitimacy, with no fear of sanctions or accountability. We have called on the Council again and again to compel Israel to end its war crimes and its violations of human rights, which

it has been perpetrating despite the unanimity in the international community on the illegitimacy of Israel's colonialist policies and arbitrary practices against the Palestinian people. It seems that the Security Council remains timid vis-à-vis the need to end Israeli aggression, to make Israel responsible for that aggression and to make it accountable for its ongoing, repeated crimes against the Palestinian people.

Israel continues to use excessive force against the Palestinian people. It has detained thousands of Palestinians. They are tortured, they are exploited, and many are simply being killed in the field. Despite its ongoing acts of terrorism, Israel now claims that it is committed to the two-State solution. We wonder: what two States are the occupier talking about? Settlements continue to be built without any restraint. Land and properties are being confiscated. Homes are being demolished. Families are being expelled. There are acts of forcible displacement. Does the Council not know, for example, that Israel took a decision to build 200 new settlements in the West Bank just days ago? Israel continues to implement its illegal plans to annex the Holy City of Al-Quds, distorting its Arab identity, changing its demographic makeup and isolating it from the Palestinian community. It continues its ongoing attempts to change the legal status of the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque, wishing to lay its hands on Islamic and Christian properties in Al-Quds and Haram Al-Sharif. What two States is Israel talking about?

Matters have reached a point where the Israeli occupation Government holds meetings in occupied Arab Syrian Golan, which is a grave development. The occupying Power is demanding that the international community recognize its occupation of the Golan. It claims that the Golan is an indivisible part of the State of Israel in the modern era, that the Golan Heights will remain in Israeli hands forever. That is a clear violation of resolution 497 (1981), as well as of all international instruments, which do not accept a change of status for occupied territories. We condemn in the strongest terms such declarations and such acts of aggression. We call upon the Council to compel Israel to implement all United Nations resolutions concerning its withdrawal from all Palestinian lands beyond the pre-1967 borders and all Arab occupied lands, including the occupied Arab Syrian Golan.

Against that backdrop, my delegation would once again like to welcome the French initiative to convene an international peace conference, as this would contribute to peace and security in the region, in accordance with the terms of reference of the peace process, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant Security Council resolutions. We must devise an effective international mechanism that ensures that an end is put to the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine within a set time frame.

The Palestinian people have long suffered from a brutal occupation, policies of racism and arbitrary repression. We commend the Palestinian people for their steadfastness and for defending their people and their holy sites. We call on the Security Council to ensure that the Israeli Government bears criminal responsibility for its actions. Israel must be called upon to immediately release all detainees and prisoners and immediately respond to the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We also reiterate our call to ensure a quick intervention so as to provide international protection to the Palestinian people. We appeal to the Security Council to respond in a manner that is commensurate with the gravity of the situation and to grant the Palestinian people their right to self-determination and their independent State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on the borders of June 1967.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wishes to express its grave concern at the continuing suffering of the brotherly Syrian people. Despite the efforts made to resolve the Syrian crisis; the adoption of resolutions 2254 (2015) and 2268 (2016); and the cessation of hostilities and the delivery of humanitarian assistance, with a view to the resumption of official negotiations on a political transition and the full implementation of Geneva I, these violations by the Syrian forces continue. Syrians are being killed and maimed on a daily basis. Their cities are being destroyed, including through the use of weapons with indiscriminate effects, including barrel bombs.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards are also present in Syria, as are Hizbullah militias, which are terrorist militias that have participated in the criminal acts perpetrated by the Syrian regime against its people. These represent grave continuing escalations that could have terrible repercussions on peace and security in the region and the entire world.

We would also like to express our grave concern at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Syria. A siege continues to be imposed on many cities and

regions, including Daraya, where dozens of women and children are protesting on their destroyed homes against the fact that international parties are ignoring them and will not act to lift the siege.

My delegation reiterates its support for the United Nations Envoy to Syria, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, within the mandate entrusted to him and resolution 2254 (2015), which set out the road map for official political negotiations on a political transition.

We wish to stress that we will continue to support the Syrian people by all means available and to respect their decisions. We call for the establishment of a transitional authority with full executive powers to build Syria's future. Syria, whose sons, whatever their political, religious or ethnic origins, reject terrorism and violence, has no place in it for those whose hands are stained with the blood of the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Ms. Lodhi (Pakistan): Today more than ever, the Middle East is a cauldron of conflict. War and suffering have steadily spread from their epicentre, the Palestinian-Israeli dispute in the Holy Land. The prospects for peace between Israel and the Palestinians are abysmal. The current Israeli leadership is fast closing off the possibility of a two-State solution, formally accepted by the parties and the international community. It is doing this willfully, through its policy of expanding settlements, demolitions and incitement, accompanied by the refusal to engage in a meaningful dialogue to implement the internationally agreed two-State solution.

Violence by the occupation forces against Palestinian children, women and other innocent Palestinians continues. Illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem increased by 250 per cent during the first three months of this year as compared with the last.

A report of the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process last week rightly acknowledged that the viability of a two-State solution was in danger. There is an ever-present danger of another intifada if a credible peace process is not revived rapidly. Unless the Israeli Government agrees to resume the implementation of the two-State solution and halts and reverses its policy of expanding settlements, the Security Council must, in accordance with its mandate and its own resolutions, adopt a concrete and legally binding plan to implement the two-State solution and take the necessary measures for its enforcement.

A two-State solution was promised by the international community to the Palestinian people. This promise was a solemn one and must be kept. An independent, contiguous and viable state of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, is and must remain our objective.

Pakistan, for its part, remains committed to supporting the Palestinians in their decades-long legitimate struggle for their rights and for their dignity. The President of Pakistan reaffirmed this commitment when he met President Abbas at the Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Jakarta last month.

It will be difficult to resolve the other crises that have proliferated in the Middle East or to stem the rise of terrorism and extremism if the world does not find a just and durable solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Meanwhile, what was termed the Arab Spring has turned into a winter of despair and suffering. The scale of the suffering in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere is unprecedented in its scope and intensity.

As we discuss solutions here today, people continue to endure unimaginable suffering, and their exodus has created a humanitarian catastrophe. There is an urgent need for statesmanship, diplomacy and dialogue. The political and ideological polarization in the region has exacerbated the consequences of external intervention, intensified sectarian and ethnic divisions and rendered political solutions more difficult.

The unity displayed by the international community in combating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) is a critical first step. But these efforts will be successful only once the world has addressed the underlying reasons for the appeal of its toxic ideology to so many young and impressionable people in so many countries.

Syria recently marked the fifth anniversary of its conflict. Every succeeding year has been worse than the one before. The Syrian people continue to suffer unimaginable hardships. Atrocities are being committed by all sides.

We all agree that there is no military solution to this conflict. It is therefore critical that the fragile cessation

of hostilities be maintained and that the proximity talks in Geneva, reconvened last week, at least chart a way forward towards a negotiated settlement.

We support the efforts of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Syria, Staffan de Mistura, and hope that all sides will accord primacy to the interests of the Syrian people in evolving a durable political solution to this vicious conflict, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter.

Positive signs are also emerging from Yemen. A truce was agreed last week and, although the direct face-to-face dialogue that was to be initiated in Kuwait earlier today has encountered a difficulty, we hope that will be temporary. We note with hope the statement of Special Envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed in the Council last week that,

> "[we] have never been so close to peace." (*S/PV.7672, p. 4*).

It will not be easy to restore peace and stability in the Middle East. Beyond diplomacy and a genuine commitment on the part of all Powers and parties to negotiated solutions, a comprehensive and enlightened policy is needed to address and overcome the underlying political, economic and social causes of those conflicts.

My country stands ready to make its contribution to the construction of a new and peaceful order in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): Before I deliver my statement, let me offer my condolences to the peoples and the Governments of Japan and Ecuador for the loss of lives as a result of the recent earthquakes.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM), and to convey the Movement's appreciation to the Chinese presidency for convening this open debate at this critical juncture for the Palestine people and the Middle East. I also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Given the time constraints, I will deliver an abridged version of my statement. The full text will be circulated.

Each and every time the Council holds an open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including question of Palestine, NAM appeals for international attention and urgent action to address the illegal and brutal Israeli occupation that is causing so much anguish to the Palestinian people, provoking deep anger and frustration and inflaming tensions. The breaches of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, that are being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, are inflicting widespread human suffering and are deliberately destabilizing the situation, with far-reaching and serious consequences for the prospects for a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and for peace and security in the Middle East and beyond.

Each time, we repeat our call to the international community, first and foremost the Security Council, to uphold the Charter of the United Nations and international law and the obligations to respect those instruments and ensure such respect, including through the necessary measures to compel Israel to end its war crimes and human rights violations against the Palestinian people and end the illegal foreign occupation of another people's land.

Regrettably, the Security Council has failed to uphold its obligations, despite the clear global consensus on both the illegality of Israel's policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the urgency of ending this decades-long conflict so that the Palestinian people can finally realize the freedom, rights and justice they have for too long been unjustly denied.

Israel, the occupying Power, has been emboldened by that inaction on the part of the international community, which has enabled it to act with impunity. Consequently, it has intensified its illegal, oppressive measures against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population, including, inter alia, by using excessive force against Palestinian civilians, including children and women, causing death and injury. As the occupying Power builds and expands more illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes not only a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention but also a war crime as defined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Israel also continues with its illegal, repressive and punitive measures, including home demolitions, leaving countless Palestinian families homeless and without hope. The destructive impact of such Israeli violations is immense, as reflected in the increasing tensions, deteriorating socioeconomic

conditions and deepening frustration and despair among the Palestinian civilian population, which has been living under the Israeli occupation for nearly half a century.

Moreover, the humanitarian disaster deliberately inflicted on the Gaza Strip by the occupying Power remains without redress, as the illegal Israeli blockade continues to obstruct the reconstruction of thousands of damaged and destroyed homes and infrastructure, and socioeconomic conditions continue to deteriorate as the blockade continues to have a suffocating effect on Gaza. The Palestinian civilian population there remains isolated from the rest of Palestine and the entire world. The situation of youth in Gaza is especially critical, as hope and opportunity are absent. We would draw the Council's attention to that critical aspect.

The Security Council must act in accordance with international humanitarian law to ensure the protection of the Palestinian civilian population under Israeli occupation. The Council must also act, in line with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Council's own resolutions, to bring a halt to Israel's ongoing illegal colonization of the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. That is a minimal and fundamental request to the Security Council and is not beyond the realm of reason, or its obligation for that matter.

How can the Council remain silent as Israel continues its systematic settlement policy, its construction of the wall, its confiscation and de facto annexation of Palestinian land under various pretexts, such as "State land" or "military exercises" or "building without permits"? Those and other systematic violations, including the demolition of homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, the arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children, and the incessant violence, terror and provocations by Israeli settlers and extremists, including at sensitive religious sites, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque, in occupied East Jerusalem, have persisted in an unabated fashion, worsening the extremely fragile situation on the ground. Such violations must be addressed immediately, because it is unacceptable to allow Israel to enjoy impunity without suffering the consequences of its actions. Any justification for such criminality must be rejected, and the time is past due to act, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and our moral responsibilities towards the question of Palestine.

Finally, at a time when the Palestinian people are facing increasing Israeli aggression and have rapidly declining hope for the possibilities for peace and justice, the Non-Aligned Movement seizes this opportunity to reaffirm its long-standing solidarity with the Palestinian people, recognizing their decades of resilience despite so much suffering and injustice. NAM reiterates its support for the realization of their legitimate national aspirations and inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and freedom in an independent and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as for a just solution to ease the plight of the Palestine refugees, in accordance with resolution 194 (III), of 1948.

Lebanon continues to suffer from continuous Israeli violations of its borders and incursions into its territory, which have been followed by years of occupation and aggression. Unfortunately, Israel still continues to violate Lebanese airspace, intensifying its incursions over Lebanon. Such activities are a blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty and the relevant international resolutions, in particular resolution 1701 (2006). The provisions of that resolution should be implemented in a manner that ensures the strengthening of the foundations of stability and security in Lebanon and prevents Israel from undertaking its daily violations of Lebanese sovereignty.

With regard to the occupied Syrian Golan, and especially in view of the recent blatant defiance exhibited against the will of the international community, the Movement condemns all the measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, which have intensified after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. NAM demands once again that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of India.

Mr. Lal (India): I thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate. We also thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing earlier today.

India has long had a clear and consistent position on the Middle East peace process. We support a negotiated solution that would result in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem

as its capital, within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Quartet road map and the relevant Security Council resolutions. India's approach to Palestine is built upon three core dimensions of solidarity with the Palestinian people: support for the Palestinian cause, support for Palestine's nation-building and support for Palestine's capacity-building efforts.

Our continued commitment to the Palestinian cause and our friendship with the Palestinian people remain an integral part of our foreign policy. That is reflected in the ongoing high-level exchanges, such as visits to Palestine by Indian leaders in the recent months, including our President, Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs.

As part of our ongoing support for the nation-building efforts of Palestine, India has consistently extended technical and financial assistance to that country. India contributes $1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. India also contributed $4 million in response to the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza.

We are concerned that, since the previous attempts at serious direct talks, which broke down two years ago, there has been a downward trend in the peace process, despite efforts to hold serious negotiations between the parties — efforts that have been inconclusive. Instead, we have seen an unfortunate escalation of tension in Gaza. Unilateral actions by the parties are, unfortunately, moving them further apart. India remains firmly convinced that dialogue is the only viable option that can effectively address the issue. We remain hopeful and urge both sides to resume the peace process soon in order to reach a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue.

In Yemen, India has been urging all of the parties concerned to resolve their differences amicably with a view to finding a consensus-based solution. We are encouraged by the planned peace talks and hope that those talks will commence soon and lead to positive outcomes.

With regard to Syria, India has consistently called for a comprehensive political solution to the conflict based on bringing all parties to the negotiating table. We hope that the intra-Syrian talks held under the auspices of the United Nations will ensure a Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition, bringing an end to the violence there and contributing to the stabilization of the country and the region.

The humanitarian situation in Syria and neighbouring countries has to be addressed effectively. India has contributed $4 million in humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees. India also participated in the London conference on Syria in February and has committed to providing bilateral humanitarian assistance to Syria.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iraq.

Mr. Mashkoor (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to congratulate the People's Republic of China on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. We would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to congratulate Angola for its wise leadership of the Council last month.

The policies of Israel, the occupying Power, rely heavily on building more settlements on lands that have been confiscated from their Arab owners, on extracting the natural resources and on subjecting the Palestinian economy and market to the laws of the occupying Power. The end purpose is to control the future of the Palestinian people and prevent their sustainable development. Settler colonialism can be considered to be the strategic, military pillar of the policy to Judaize the occupied territories and to impose a fait accompli on the Arab States and the Palestinians in negotiations. While there was a sincere intention on the part of the Arab party to end this long-standing dispute and to achieve a just peace, those policies have undermined peace efforts in the region.

The demolition of Palestinian homes by the Israeli occupation authorities will not bring peace to Israel. It is an inhumane act that runs counter to the right to housing. Israel also violates the standards of criminal law, which calls for the punishment of those who commit the crime in question. As such, criminal law cannot impose collective punishment on family members. Israel uses a policy of collective punishment that was prevalent in the Middle Ages. The siege on Gaza, the detentions, the increasing rate of violence and the imposition of collective punishment, as well as the provocations by Jewish extremist settlers, serve only to exacerbate tensions in Palestine and the Middle East region in general. Iraq calls on the Security Council

to provide international protection for the Palestinian people in all of the occupied Palestinian territories, in accordance with the relevant international conventions and international humanitarian law, in order to put an end to the unprecedented violations committed against the sacred shrines in Jerusalem, including Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also call on the Council to ensure the complete withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories to the borders of 1967, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Iraq welcomes the French initiative on the convening of an international conference on the Palestinian question and the peace process. We would hope that the initiative would lead to tangible results by providing an international political impetus for the peace process and by addressing all the issues that have made it difficult to arrive at a peaceful solution to end the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. We would also hope that it would ensure the establishment of a viable Palestinian State that can exist in peace and assume its place in the international community. However, as a result of the intransigence of Israel, which does not believe in the Palestinian right to self-determination or to recovery of the usurped territories, Iraq does not expect that any international conference can succeed. The experience of past conferences does not encourage us to expect anything more than diplomatic courtesies, which do not really respond to the suffering of our Palestinian brothers living under occupation.

We would like to express our solidarity with our brothers in occupied Palestine and their struggle, which is legitimate under the rules of international law, for the establishment of an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the 1967 borders. We urge the relevant international parties to move faster and overcome the impediments that have made it difficult to achieve the two-State solution.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Djani (Indonesia): Let me begin by expressing the appreciation of my delegation to the presidency of the People's Republic of China for convening this open debate, and to the Secretary-General for his briefing.

My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to express condolences to the Governments of Ecuador and Japan for the tragic loss of lives resulting from the devastating earthquakes last week.

Indonesia associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and with the statement to be delivered by the representative of the State of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

This debate comes at a time when there is increasing global concern about the prospects for peace in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Last January, the Secretary-General spoke about the growing frustration, alienation and despair felt by the Palestinians with regard to the prolonged occupation of their homeland. Since then, violence in the occupied Palestinian territory has continued to grow at an alarming pace. No progress can be seen in the efforts to halt the violence or address the injustice and oppression committed against Palestinians. Indonesia is following with deep concern that troubling development. Not only does the continued violence reflect the hurdles on the way of peace, it also symbolizes the hardening of suspicion and animosity between the two peoples, which could hinder efforts to restart the political process.

Indonesia remains convinced that the occupation must be brought to an end and that all efforts must be exerted to achieve the two-State solution. Indeed, last month, the fifth Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, hosted by the Government of Indonesia, drew the attention of the international community to the urgency of attaining a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. The Summit also called on the international community to support the boycott of products produced in or by the illegal Israeli settlements.

Israel's continued construction of illegal settlements in and around East Jerusalem, along with other illegal activities, poses a further challenge to efforts to find a wise course of action. It is the responsibility of Israel, the occupying Power, to observe and comply with its international obligations, such as the protection of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people and to prevent the occurrence of extrajudicial killings, which have been rampant in recent times. Israel must also realize that its restrictions on the movements of Palestinians and the arbitrary conduct of its security forces against Palestinians can only breed anger and

resentment and that it must refrain from committing collective punishment.

The United Nations has adopted hundreds of resolutions on the question of Palestine since the Organization was established. Last month, the Commission on the Status of Women adopted yet another resolution on the situation of Palestinian women, which Indonesia co-sponsored. Sadly, despite the overwhelming support of Member States for all resolutions on the question of Palestine, no substantial efforts have been undertaken to implement them. Indonesia has repeatedly called on the Security Council to delay no further in ensuring that Israel complies with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Council must also pave the way for the resumption of a credible peace process aimed at putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The world cannot wait any longer for us to hold briefings and closed consultations while people are losing their lives and the two-State solution is fading away. In that regard, I would like to express Indonesia's appreciation for the initiative on the part of the relevant parties to mobilize the support of the international community and push the peace process forward.

With regard to the conflict in Syria, Indonesia once again urges all concerned and interested parties to work hard to bring the conflict to an end and allow humanitarian assistance to reach all those in need. It is absolutely intolerable that the conflict, which has been ongoing for approximately five years, has dragged on for so long, with repercussions now being felt around the world. That fact only underlines the imperative of an inclusive process involving all Syrians to settle the conflict.

Indonesia remains hopeful that the round of peace talks that began in Geneva last week will build the momentum needed for an inclusive political process. We commend the work of the United Nations in facilitating the talks, especially the dedication shown by the Special Envoy, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and encourage all parties to the conflict to respect the goals of peace and humanity. We urge all Syrians to make full use of the current diplomatic impetus by swiftly reaching a political settlement that can serve as a basis for future peace and stability in Syria.

With respect to Yemen and Libya, we welcome the continued dialogue that could boost efforts to restore national unity and peace in the region. What is at stake are the lives of many innocent civilians.

Lastly, Indonesia remains steadfast in its commitments to ensuring peace and stability in the Middle East and will do its utmost to attain that noble objective.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Archbishop Auza: The Holy See commends China's presidency for bringing the topic of the Middle East to the attention of the international community through today's Security Council open debate.

The Holy See shares the grave concern of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nikolay Mladenov, that the two-State solution between Israel and Palestine is in danger of failing, as peace talks stall and inflammatory rhetoric, acts of terror and unilateral actions scupper efforts to restore a process of meaningful dialogue and compromise. In the face of such a frustrating scenario, Pope Francis pleads with both the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities to consider their own peoples' need for peace and courageously pursue the path of dialogue, reconciliation and peace, because there is simply no other way.

During his May 2014 visit to Jordan, Palestine and Israel, Pope Francis expressed special concern for the Holy City of Jerusalem, the patrimony of the world's monotheistic religions and a city of universal importance:

> "Jerusalem means, of course, 'city of peace'. This is what God wills it to be, and such is the desire of all people of goodwill."

Yet sadly, Jerusalem remains deeply troubled because of long-standing conflicts.

The Holy See firmly believes that the two-State solution provides the best possibility for a peaceful settlement. Pope Francis reiterated that position at Tel Aviv Airport, when he pleaded both for a universal recognition of the right of the State of Israel to exist and to flourish in peace and security within internationally recognized borders, and for the creation of a viable State of Palestine, a sovereign homeland in which the Palestinians can live in peace, dignity and freedom.

The two-State solution must become a reality and not remain merely a dream.

My delegation wishes to reiterate the appeal that Pope Francis made to the Palestinian authorities on 25 May 2014 in Bethlehem:

> "The time has come for everyone to find the courage to be generous and creative in the service of the common good, and to find the courage to forge a peace which rests on the acknowledgment by all of the right of two States to exist and live in peace and security within internationally recognized borders."

The Holy See hopes that the comprehensive agreement between the Holy See and the State of Palestine, which came into full force on 2 January 2016, will encourage all parties to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to engage sincerely in a negotiated and peaceful solution. In the complex reality of the Middle East, the Holy See hopes that the agreement may serve as an example of dialogue and cooperation, in particular for other Arab- and Muslim-majority countries in the region.

The Holy See reiterates its appeal that special attention must be given to Lebanon, where refugees from neighbouring conflicts constitute nearly a quarter of the population. The Parliament of Lebanon must act to elect a President. Soon Lebanon will have been without a President for two years, at a time of regional instability and the growth of vicious non-State actors. The international community must assist the leaders of Lebanon to constitutionally stabilize their own Government and deal with the immense burden of the refugee population.

My delegation also calls on the international community to take collective political action to stem the spread of the fundamentalism and extremism, which have sown terror in so many countries in the region, in North Africa and in many parts of the world. The internationalization of terror can be countered only by a collective international response. Ideological terror cannot be effectively defeated by military action alone; it must be tackled by also addressing the root causes upon which international terrorism feeds. The lie and blasphemy of terrorist groups that claim to kill and oppress in the name of religion must be openly denounced in the strongest possible terms. Religious leaders in particular have a grave responsibility to condemn fellow believers who use their religion as a justification for violence.

Finally, the Holy See appeals once again to the international community to hear the cries of the beleaguered communities of Christians and other ethnic and religious minority groups in the Middle East, which are being discriminated against, persecuted, slaughtered, set afire or drowned because they do not share the ideological or religious views of their persecutors. Their very peaceful enculturation as minorities into the majority culture has made them particular targets for the extremist violence that has forced them to flee their homes and abandon their properties and homeland, risking everything as they cross inhospitable deserts and perilous seas in search of calmer shores and welcoming communities, which, unfortunately, they do not always find. My delegation therefore hopes that Pope Francis's visit two days ago to the migrants and refugees stranded on the Greek island of Lesbos has touched many hearts.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mrs. Kawar (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your presidency of the Security Council this month, as well as to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing. I would also like to offer our deep condolences to the Government and the people of Japan and to the families of the earthquake victims there.

Our region is dealing with many political and intellectual challenges and a very complex reality. Words are simply inadequate to express the fear and suffering that the peoples of the region are enduring, whether in the occupied Palestinian territory, Syria, Yemen or other countries. The increasing gravity of the conflicts is forcing us to ask whether the international community's intervention, through the resolutions and international instruments adopted at the United Nations, is enough. Have we failed to ensure lasting stability?

Jordan made major efforts during its membership of the Security Council to try to arrive at realistic solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East. We have often voiced our vision in that regard, emphasizing that the main issue is still the question of Palestine and the lack of a just and lasting solution to it, which continues to undermine previous efforts to resolve the problem of the Middle East. We cannot ignore the inherent link between a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and

peace in the region. We need a comprehensive approach to its various aspects and a genuine effort on the part of the international community to reach a lasting solution that will prevent violence and extremism from exploiting this vacuum and expanding the crisis to the entire region and the rest of the world.

Israel's daily illegal violations — its demolitions of homes, forced expulsions and displacements of residents and attempts to change the status quo, first and foremost through methodical colonial expansion — are outrageous. We condemn them and urge the Council to live up to its responsibility and to take steps immediately to end the colonization in the West Bank and Jerusalem, which is a violation of international law. Israel's actions on the ground run counter to its declarations and stated positions and hinder every effort to re-launch the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.

We therefore reaffirm the need for serious efforts to pursue negotiations on a two-State solution within defined parameters, including a specific timetable for arriving at an agreement on an independent Palestinian State, within the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the relevant international initiatives and the Arab Peace Initiative. This should also aim to guarantee the supreme vital interests of Jordan, which are linked to all the aspects of a definitive solution. Jerusalem, the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Al-Haram Al-Sharif have a very particular significance for His Majesty King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein, owing to the historical custodianship of Jordan, which is the guarantor of the Muslim and Christian holy sites and has spared no effort to defend them against the Israeli authorities' unilateral and illegal acts of aggression towards the Holy City.

As it has always done, Jordan will firmly oppose all who try to violate the holy sites. Under its custodianship, Jordan will continue to explore every possibility for taking diplomatic and legal steps to end Israel's violations and acts of aggression. We consider its actions to be null and void, particularly because they are carried out by an occupying Power that by its very nature cannot be held accountable for its acts. Any regional or international initiative to resolve the conflict will remain mere empty words if we do not demonstrate the political will and international commitment needed to move forward. We continue to await a serious display of commitment and engagement to peace on the part of Israel, and we demand that Israel end its activities in the occupied territory. This is not just a demand by the Palestinians; it is an international demand with the goal of saving a people who are being deprived of their basic rights to dignity and security.

I turn now to the crisis in Syria, which has caused unspeakable destruction and displaced millions of people. We must redouble our efforts to support the United Nations and to ensure the success of the current negotiations on a political agreement based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 2254 (2015). Jordan reiterates its support for the efforts of Mr. Staffan de Mistura and the International Syria Support Group. We hope the negotiations will enable the parties to achieve a political transition and assure the establishment of a constitution and secure governance that can help to restore security and stability to Syria and enable its refugees to return and begin a new era in their country's history.

The numbers and flows of refugees from Syria to its neighbours and to Europe continue to increase and are living proof of the enormous humanitarian tragedy in Syria, which threatens to blow up the entire region. Jordan will continue to take the high moral and humanitarian ground and to fulfil its duty to Syria's refugees. The heavy burden we have taken on is exhausting our limited resources. It is therefore essential that the international community abide by its commitments, live up to its responsibilities and provide us with assistance in accordance with its pledges at the London conference in February, so as to enable Jordan and the other countries hosting refugees to cope with their growing burden. Jordan proposed a comprehensive new approach at the conference for dealing with the humanitarian crisis of the Syrian refugees, focused on finding durable solutions based on international development. We call on the international community to support our appeal for the period from 2016 to 2018.

While it is essential to fight terrorist groups, it is also crucial that we deal with the underlying causes of their activity. We have become victims and hostages to their activities in the region, which are preventing our countries from achieving their aspirations as they find themselves still living under the threat of terrorism. We must unite the international efforts to eradicate such groups, which exploit religion, and point out that their Takfiri views have nothing to do with the Muslim faith; on the contrary, they are targeting the Muslim faith. The activities of such terrorists not only hurt Islam, they represent an attack on all monotheistic religions

and the humanist principles that hold human life sacred and privilege mind and logic.

It is therefore essential that international efforts be concerted to confront such groups, in particular Da'esh. We need to strengthen young people's involvement in society, so that they can resist the influence of extremist thought and terrorism. That is what we have done through the adoption of resolution 2250 (2015), with regard to youth, peace and security.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Zaayman (South Africa): South Africa would like to thank you, Sir, for having convened this debate. We also join others in thanking the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for his briefing.

Unfortunately, the reports that we receive every month confirm that the situation in Palestine is deteriorating daily, while the international community, including the Security Council, remains unwilling or unable to deal with the matter.

South Africa aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, and we wish to make the following additional comments.

Let me start by reiterating South Africa's condemnation of all forms of violence, regardless of who the perpetrators are, and we again urge all parties to engage in dialogue. Unfortunately, the situation on the ground in Palestine and Israel today has set back earlier gains, and should the parties agree to re-start the negotiations, they will have to focus again on basic elements of a peace aimed at creating an enabling environment for negotiations. We have consistently warned that the situation on the ground will change to such a degree that the future of a two-State solution will become more and more elusive. Unfortunately, we are perilously close to that scenario becoming a reality.

Notwithstanding the grim picture, a small glimmer of hope remains. We noted that Israel and Jordan were able to reach an agreement on monitoring Israeli activity around the Temple Mount, or Al-Haram Al-Sharif. That agreement is timely, and we hope that it will de-escalate tensions and prevent violence, especially with Passover approaching. It is essential that the importance of those holy sites to a variety of major religious groups be respected equally by all parties. South Africa rejects the use of holy sites to incite violence. Because there is no progress on negotiations, including on the status of Jerusalem and its holy sites, it is imperative to maintain the so-called post-1967 status quo. Although far from ideal, we believe that those measures would contribute to limiting provocations and reducing violence.

The Council's failure is clearly demonstrated by the continued expansion of the Israeli settlements, which are illegal under international law. Israel's appropriation of land continues unabated. On 15 March, Israel announced the appropriation of 579 acres of land in the occupied West Bank near Jericho, the largest seizure of West Bank land in recent years. The building of those settlements is not only contrary to international law, but it represents an obstacle to a two-State solution and peace. We sincerely hope that all Council members will uphold their responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and put an end to the illegal appropriation of land. South Africa stands ready to work with all parties and the broader international community, including members of the Security Council, to advocate for the immediate cessation of settlement activities by Israel in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Ms. Rodríguez Abascal (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba endorses the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The situation in the Middle East continues to be a source of constant concern for the international community, which has been reflected in the numerous previous debates organized by the Security Council. Despite the periodic open debates held by the Council on the issue, which have demonstrated overwhelming support for the Palestinian cause, the Council has not been able to adopt a single resolution demanding from Israel to put an end to its aggressive policies, settlement activities, war crimes and the collective punishment committed against the Palestinian people, which are in clear and deliberate violation of international law and international humanitarian law. Those actions constitute a threat to regional and international peace and security by depriving the Palestinian people of its fundamental human rights.

The inaction of the Council with regard to such acts is alarming. It is unacceptable that the Security Council continues to be held hostage to the power

emanating from the use or the threat of the use of the veto to prevent the Council from fulfilling its mandate and protecting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It is morally unacceptable that the Security Council continues to shirk from its responsibility under the Charter of the United Nations with regard to maintaining international peace and security within the context of this conflict.

The international community calls on the Council to fulfil its responsibility and spare no effort in making the necessary decisions to end the occupation, the various forms of aggression, the illegal settlements, the flagrant, massive and systematic violations of human rights, State terrorism, extrajudicial executions, economic strangulation and collective punishment, for which Israel is responsible. Israel must also end its outright rejection of and disrespect for the provisions of numerous resolutions of the General Assembly. Those actions threaten the viability of a Palestinian State and the possibility to resolve the conflict in a fair and balanced manner.

The only possible solution to the Palestinian question is the peaceful coexistence of two States. An independent, sovereign and viable Palestine, existing within the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, deserves global respect and solidarity. Cuba is convinced that a just and lasting solution to the demands of the Palestinian people to exercise their rights is fundamental to resolving the conflicts and easing the tensions in the Middle East. Cuba reaffirms its full support for the admission of Palestine as a full Member of the Organization and calls on the Security Council to decide on and accept without delay Palestine's application from 2011 to be recognized as a State Member of the United Nations, as clearly desired by the vast majority of States in the Organization. The historical debt to the Palestinian people is enormous and must be repaid. The Council has the responsibility to take concrete action to end such a protracted injustice.

With regard to the situation in Syria, Cuba reiterates that it will be possible to achieve peace in that country only by respecting the right of the Syrian people to choose their own destiny. A political solution through dialogue and negotiation is the only viable solution to the conflict in that country. Cuba welcomes the cessation of hostilities and the new channels that are opening, aimed at providing a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflict. We support the Syrian people in their aspirations to live in peace and choose their own destiny without outside interference. Those who have fuelled the conflict from the outside, with the stated goal of imposing regime change, are responsible for the thousands of civilian victims of the conflict.

We regret the loss of innocent lives as a result of the situation there and condemn all acts of violence taking place in that country against the civilian population. Promoting an interventionist agenda must not be allowed under the pretext of combating terrorism. We demand the cessation of the foreign presence in Syria, as it does not have the approval of its Government and is not working in coordination with its authorities.

The Security Council is a crucial organ for achieving the aims entrusted to the United Nations of safeguarding peace and achieving the well-being and the development all peoples deserve, including those of the Middle East. In respecting the mandate established by the Charter of the United Nations and in fulfilling the responsibilities pursuant to that mandate, the Council is called upon to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the conflicts and disputes in the Middle East, which would make it possible to preserve the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of all States in the region, which would in turn contribute in a decisive way to creating the conditions for the progress and well-being of all the peoples of the region.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kuwait.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

I would like to express my sincere congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. Please allow me also to express our appreciation for convening this timely debate to address the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I also thank the Secretary-General for his important briefing on the current situation.

We meet again as the occupied Palestinian territory, in particularly the occupied city of Jerusalem, is enduring an unprecedented escalation of Israeli military aggression and terrorist attacks by Israeli settlers against the defenceless Palestinian people and their holy places, without political, legal or moral deterrents. The Security Council is meeting at a time when Israel is continuing its gross, systematic crimes and breaches

of international law, many tantamount to war crimes. Israeli arrogance and disrespect for agreements with the Palestinian side, as well as the total impunity it enjoys for its violations and crimes, have brought the situation to a dangerous juncture. Yet, regrettably, the Council remains silent, disregarding its duty for the maintenance of international peace and security and its commitment to protect civilians in armed conflict.

Since the previous debate, in January (see S/PV.7610), Israel, the occupying Power, has continued killing and injuring Palestinian civilians, especially youths. Since the current wave of unrest began, in October 2015, Israel's shoot-to-kill policy has claimed the lives of more than 204 Palestinian civilians, 48 of whom were children. Likewise, the Israeli military aggression and settler terrorism have left 17,000 Palestinians injured. Israel has also continued detaining, imprisoning, abusing and torturing thousands of Palestinians in its detention centres; destroying homes and infrastructure; and forcibly displacing Palestinians. In addition, Israel has used all other forms of ongoing collective punishment of Palestinian civilians, the most egregious of which is its inhumane, illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip, which amount to systematic human rights violations and grave breaches of international humanitarian law.

At the same time, Israel, the occupying Power, has persisted with its unlawful colonization of Palestinian land, including through the construction and expansion of settlements and the separation wall, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem. All of those violations blatantly aim at illegally, forcibly and deliberately altering the character, status and demography of the occupied Palestinian territory, thereby destroying the viability of the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders. In that regard, the OIC reiterates that all such acts by Israel, including in particular against the Christian and Islamic holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem, constitute a flagrant violation of international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. They fuel increased extremism, violence and racism, as well as religious conflict, all of which demand the urgent attention and action of the Security Council.

It is incomprehensible that Israel continues to perpetrate violations and crimes without a response or punishment. We once again call on the Council to assume its responsibility for providing the Palestinian people with international protection. The Council and the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention have clear responsibilities in ensuring the protection and security of the Palestinian people. It must be stressed that the right to security is not exclusive to Israel. Security is a right that should be provided to, and enjoyed by, all nations. The victims of this nearly five-decades-long illegal, foreign occupation should not be the exception.

At the same time, we should stress that an exit from the current crisis and the revival of peace prospects will not be possible without compelling Israel, the occupying Power, to end its illegal construction and expansion of its colonial settlements and the wall in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem. That is an urgent priority in line with the Security Council's own resolutions, and imperative for saving the two-State solution from demise.

I should note that the OIC, at its Extraordinary Summit held in Jakarta last month, called on the Council to uphold its Charter duties, as well as its legal and moral obligations to ensure accountability for the illegal actions perpetrated by the occupying Power, and to act to protect the Palestinian civilian population and end the pervasive, systematic and gross violations of their human rights. The OIC reiterates its call for a draft resolution that sets a specific timetable and practical steps to end Israeli occupation in all manifestations, including the illegal settlement regime, on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to reaffirm once more the OIC support for, and solidarity with, the Palestinian people in their endeavours to regain their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and independence in their own State on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to achieve a just solution to the question of Palestinian refugees, pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions — a solution that is long overdue and that remains a legal and moral responsibility for the Council to fulfil.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Wilfreid I. Emvula, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Emvula: As we meet again for a periodic debate on the Palestinian question, and while there are rays of hope for the victims of other conflicts in the

region, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows no such sign. Indeed, were it not for the date stamp on the news reports, they would read like those from months and years ago.

Data published by the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics reveal that, in 2015, settlement construction increased vis-à-vis the preceding year. In early 2016, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the confiscation of Palestinian land and its being redesignated as so-called Israeli State land, as well as the displacement of Palestinians, have already exceeded those of all of 2015. So have the mass arrests of Palestinians and their long-term incarceration without a charge or trial, under the label of administrative detention, a practice that is illegal under international law. Those unilateral measures, taken at the expense of Palestinian rights and freedoms, mark a new and fairly disturbing phase in terms of the clash between international humanitarian law and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

Furthermore, despite repeated assertions that the situation could not remain the same following the 2014 war, Gaza is still under Israeli blockade and the pace of reconstruction remains inadequate for the needs of the Strip, while disbursement by donors of the funds pledged for the Strip's reconstruction continues to be painfully slow. Unfortunately, the few voices in Israel objecting to these policies and calling for constructive negotiations with the goal of reaching a just peace are facing increasing measures to silence them completely, for example through proposed legislation on non-governmental groups and on the suspension of members from the Israeli Parliament, which targets Arab members of the Knesset.

In 2015, the Security Council held 13 meetings to consider the Palestinian question, but failed to initiate any action. It is hoped that the Council will act and support the draft resolution currently being circulated by the Arab Group reiterating the Council's demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. The non-permanent members of the Council, including the five members that also serve on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, have actively engaged the Council on this issue, most recently through exploring options for a mechanism to protect the civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, on the basis of existing Council resolutions. We hope that such efforts will soon bear fruit. The Committee welcomes the recent efforts, most notably by the Government of France and the Middle East Quartet, to explore ways to overcome the obstacles that stalled the bilateral negotiations, and continues to offer its full support to those endeavours.

Without the combined efforts of the international community and the parties on the ground, the current situation, bleak as it already appears, will only get worse. In order to stop and reverse the spiral of violence, the Palestinian people have to regain the hope for a better future and for a free and sovereign State of their own that offers prospects for a dignified future, so that they and their children can feel that theirs is a movement forward, not a slide backwards into the abyss. We also hope that Palestinian reconciliation efforts will succeed.

For all of this to happen, the generic vilification of Palestinians, which at the moment is all too common in Israel, has to end. Such demagoguery leads to a dehumanization of Palestinians in the eyes of the Israeli public and, ultimately, to such incidents as the apparent extrajudicial execution of an injured and incapacitated Palestinian in Hebron by an Israeli soldier just a few weeks ago. The Committee welcomes the subsequent statements by Israeli officials that such actions are unlawful and illegitimate and that their perpetrators will be prosecuted, and hopes that actions will follow those words. The Committee also welcomes the clear and repeated rejection of violence by the Government of the State of Palestine, most recently again by President Abbas, including on Israeli television just over two weeks ago. I would like to reiterate here in the Council that the Committee condemns all forms of terrorism and regrets all losses of civilian life.

More needs to be done. In order for a peace to be agreed upon and then sustained, a modicum of trust has to be re-established. The Committee will do its utmost to contribute to this endeavour, for instance by providing a forum for exchanges between Palestinians and Israelis at its international meetings and continuing to encourage dialogue and synergies between civil-society organizations on both sides. One such example was a panel discussion on "Women's role in the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace", organized by the Working Group of the Committee during the sixtieth meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Additionally, in March the Committee organized a round table on the legal aspects of the question of Palestine in Amman to enhance the capacity of the State

of Palestine to fulfil its obligations in the light of its recent accession to a host of international treaties and conventions. In two weeks, the Committee will hold the International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem in Dakar, organized jointly with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In line with the mandate of the Committee, in the coming months a United Nations seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people will be held in Stockholm, focusing on how Palestine can work towards the Sustainable Development Goals under the occupation, and the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, to be held in Paris, will examine how the international community can reinvigorate the peace process. The Committee welcomes active participation by all Member States and civil society organizations in these events.

I am fully conscious of the fact that warnings of impending doom have been given so often and for so long in the case of Israel and Palestine that many have become inured to them. The situation in the region should serve as a stark reminder of how quickly a catastrophe can break out. It is because the price of failure is too terrifying to contemplate that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will continue its strong efforts towards a peaceful and just solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which can be achieved only by ending the occupation, through the two-State solution on the basis of pre-1967 borders and the just resolution of all final-status issues.

Our efforts do not support the rights of one group at the expense of the other. Finding and sustaining a just peace is the only way in which Palestinian and Israeli societies can endure and prosper. Failure to achieve a peaceful solution would ultimately destroy both.

The Committee will continue to advocate and work towards the goal, enshrined in the United Nations Charter, that the Palestinian people, like all other peoples of the world, realize their right to self-determination. For this we will cooperate with our partners and all those who share our common values, those of the United Nations.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Nicaragua wishes to reiterate its congratulations to the People's Republic of China for the outstanding work in the presidency of the Council this month and for having convened this extremely important debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

First and foremost, we would like to express our feelings of solidarity with the peoples and the Governments of Ecuador and Japan in the wake of the earthquakes that occurred, as well as to the victims and their families.

Nicaragua aligns itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and with the statement delivered by the representative of Namibia on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Sixty-eight years have elapsed and we continue to denounce Israel's occupation and its expansionist policies, which undermine all efforts to achieve peace, while the Government of Israel continues to reject the establishment of an independent, sovereign and independent Palestinian State. Every time we address the Security Council on this topic, we express our opposition to the occupation, the suffering of the Palestinian people and its victims. However, the pleas of the Palestinian people and the voice of the international community continue to be neither heard nor heeded. And we see 5.5 million Palestinian refugees ignored in this global refugee crisis. They are ignored by those who continue to promote Israel's impunity and to obstruct a solution with regard to the ongoing use of the veto against the creation and recognition of a Palestine State as a full member of the community of nations.

On its seventieth anniversary, the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (General Assembly resolution 70/1) as an effort to eradicate poverty and misery and create decent conditions for the common welfare of all peoples. But we must ask ourselves: Will it be possible for the Palestinian people to exercise that right to development? And, furthermore, will they be able to achieve the agreed Sustainable Development Goals if the political space for the Palestinian State is occupied by Israel?

The answer is obvious. The Palestinian economy is an economy of occupation, in particular in the Gaza Strip, which applies to all levels and in all spheres of the Palestinian people's lives — from the occupation of their lands, the use of their natural resources, the denial of their right to freedom of movement and the

return of refugees, the confinement of its citizens and the daily destruction of their infrastructure. With each passing day it fragments the little amount of territory that they have left and destroys with it any possibility of two States.

Once again, we condemn and reiterate that this vicious circle of agression-reconstruction-aggression must stop. Israel continues to colonize the occupied Palestinian territories, in particular East Jerusalem, in full view of an acquiescent international community. Urged on by the alarming increase and worsening of Israeli abuses of Palestinians, once again we again call on the Security Council to demand that Israel fully halt its occupation of Palestine, lift the criminal blockade of Gaza and release all Palestinian prisoners, to whom we reiterate our full solidarity.

Moreover, Nicaragua stands in solidarity with the Palestinian cause and demands the immediate creation of a Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital, thereby laying the foundation for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, with the two States — Palestine and Israel — living side by side in peace.

We cannot fail to note that the policies of interference, intervention and change of Governments undertaken by the NATO countries in the Middle East and North Africa have benefited Israel. They have diverted attention away from the needs of the Palestinian people and their struggle for a State, and at the same time it allows Israel to pursue more aggressive practices and policies against the region.

Peace in the Middle East does not just involve a solution for the Palestinian question, but must necessarily include Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon and all the occupied Arab territories — from the Syrian Golan Heights to the other occupied Arab territories. It is also imperative to end foreign interference and intervention in the region in order to finally bring about a region of peace and security for the Arab and Israeli peoples.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mr. Pedersen (Norway): Nothing would do more to pave the way for broader regional stabilization than finding a political settlement to the conflict in Syria. Norway fully supports the Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's tireless efforts to that end. All sides bear a heavy responsibility to turn the talks into a credible negotiating process that can lead to a genuine political transition. That means that the parties must start tackling the difficult questions set out in resolution 2254 (2015). And that includes the establishment of credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governance, an inclusive transitional governing body and a process for drafting a new constitution. The parties also bear a heavy responsibility not to undermine the political process through detrimental actions on the ground.

The Syrian population has already endured the intolerable. The scale of destruction, death and hunger has been immense. Three out of four Syrians are now living in poverty. More than 2 million children are out of school. We urge the parties to ensure that the cessation of hostilities agreement is respected and that humanitarian access is improved, including for medical supplies. That is also crucial for the political process.

In February, donor countries pledged approximately $12 billion in support of Syria and the region for 2016-2020. The pledge for 2016 alone was $6 billion. That was an unprecedented pledge, but disbursements are lagging far behind schedule. It is time to honour the pledges that have been made.

Resolving the conflict between Israelis and the Palestinians remains vital for securing regional stability and prosperity and for international peace and security. We must seek to counter those who are eroding the vision of the two-State solution, either deliberately or by default. The status quo will not benefit anyone; maintaining it will only cause more instability. For every day the status quo continues, an opportunity for peace is missed. The occupation is deeply damaging to Israelis and Palestinians alike. The two-State solution is the only credible way towards viable and long-term peace. The parties themselves need to make greater strides to resolve the conflict. The current tensions call for immediate and coordinated steps by all sides. All violence must stop.

Israel must stop building settlements and stop house demolitions. The Palestinians must strengthen their institutions and implement essential reforms. The necessary political compromises must be found to improve the situation in Gaza. The responsibility for solving the conflict lies with the parties. At the same time, the international community needs to make greater efforts to ensure a just and agreed solution based on the two-State solution. It is also in our

interest to do so. We cannot let this conflict continue to aggravate the situation in a region that is already in turmoil. The Security Council must therefore live up to its responsibility.

Tomorrow in Brussels, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway will convene a meeting of the donor coordination group, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. The Commmittee's goal is to build institutions for statehood and make the Palestinian economy as sustainable as possible, until the conflict is resolved. The aim of the meeting is to develop a plan for balancing the Palestinian budget. The plan will address matters such as plugging fiscal leakages, making the revenue-sharing arrangements between Israel and Palestine more effective and developing a sustainable Palestinian economy through growth and private sector investments. If the donors are to continue to develop a Palestinian State, there must be a credible political horizon for resolving the conflict. A sustainable economy is essential for a future independent Palestinian State, but the ultimate goal must be to resolve the conflict.

As we all know, it is difficult to make peace. The Security Council must show leadership and stake out a path that leads to the resumption of the peace process.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Korea.

Mr. Hahn Choonghee (Republic of Korea): I thank you, Sir, for convening this year's second quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

At the outset, I would like to extend the Republic of Korea's heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the victims of the earthquakes in Ecuador and Japan. The Republic of Korea is actively participating in international efforts aimed at rapid recovery in the affected areas.

The Republic of Korea expresses serious concern about the continuing violence between Israel and Palestine at the cost of many lives and the viability of the two-State solution. Genuine and lasting peace can never be imposed by one party's unilateral and coercive measures; rather, it can be achieved only through direct negotiations between the parties, based on mutual recognition and coexistence. The Republic of Korea joins the international call for the parties to end the violence and incitement, and to take confidence-building measures with a view to resuming negotiations and creating a viable framework for the two-State solution.

In particular, we take note of the recent report of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, according to which the demolition of Palestinian homes and livelihood structures more than doubled in the period of October 2015 to March 2016, in comparison with the previous six months, and that the number of demolitions by mid-April of this year had already exceeded the total for 2015. Confidence-building measures, including ending settlement expansion in the occupied territory, are urgently required to create an environment that is more conducive to dialogue for sustainable peace between the parties.

We also express concern about the lack of unity among the Palestinian parties. Unity and consensus among the Palestinian people is a prerequisite to achieve peace and an independent, sovereign and democratic State. At the same time, the Republic of Korea calls for the Middle East Quartet to step up its mediation efforts and looks forward to seeing produce practical recommendations to advance the two-State solution.

With regard to Syria, the Republic of Korea welcomes signs of progress on the ground, including the stabilization of the security situation since the cessation of hostilities on 27 February, increased humanitarian access to some areas and the new round of intra-Syrian talks from 13 April. However, great concerns remain about the non-compliance by all parties with the agreed cessation of hostilities and the serious impediments to access to international humanitarian assistance for millions of Syrians in dire need, including the 4.6 million people in the besieged or hard-to-reach areas. Compliance with the agreed cessation of hostilities by all parties and guaranteed unhindered humanitarian access throughout the country are not only critical to creating conditions that promote the peace process, but that also hint at the results of such a process. The Republic of Korea once again urges all parties to strictly comply with the cessation of hostilities and urges the Syrian Government to guarantee full, sustained, and unimpeded humanitarian access. We support the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, Staffan de Mistura, to reach consensus among the parties and to forge a road map for a viable political transition in Syria.

Turning to Yemen, the Republic of Korea expresses regret that the third round of peace talks — which were supposed to begin today in Kuwait — has been postponed. We urge all parties to strictly abide by the agreement on the cessation of hostilities and resume peace talks without further delay. The Republic of Korea reiterates its strong support for the critical role of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, in mediating between the parties in order to establish peace in Yemen.

With regard to Libya, the Republic of Korea welcomes the arrival of the Presidency Council in Tripoli on 30 March as a significant step towards the establishment of the Government of National Accord, in accordance with the Libyan political agreement and resolution 2259 (2015). Considering the grave threat from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and its attempts to further expand its influence into the central part of the country, establishing the Government of National Accord and normalizing its functions are more urgent than ever. The Republic of Korea urges all parties to put national security ahead of their own interests and to cooperate with the Presidency Council and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Martin Kobler, in this process. The Republic of Korea will join in international efforts for the stabilization and reconstruction of Libya.

The situation in the Middle East has long been one of the main items on the agenda of the Security Council. However, the peace process between Israel and Palestine has been stagnant for too long and the multifaceted crises in Syria, Yemen and other countries in the region have resulted in enormous human suffering in the region and beyond. The status quo is not sustainable. We still have the political momentum necessary to resolve these overdue conflicts and crises. The Republic of Korea once again urges all the parties to the conflicts to take the necessary measures to resolve them and bring about peace, and reiterates its commitment to play a constructive role to that end.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Sabarullah Khan (Sri Lanka): Sri Lanka associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. I would like to make the following statement in my national capacity.

Conflicts in Syria and Yemen, an unprecedented refugee crisis and a surge in violent extremism have contributed to the growing instability across the Middle East region. In that context, the Palestinian question takes on added importance. Especially at this time of unprecedented unrest in the Middle East, when our focus is on Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh, and the exigent refugee crisis in Syria, the world must not forget the dire humanitarian situation of the Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially Gaza, where conditions are indefensible. We stress the urgent need for leadership in order to end the marginalization and oppression of Palestinians in their own land.

Sri Lanka supports the work of United Nations agencies in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian. Affairs, which keep the majority of the people in Gaza supplied with the bare necessities, including education. We reiterate the need for continued funding by the donor community to enable UNRWA to function effectively.

As Chair of the United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, Sri Lanka is particularly concerned about the escalating violence and the number of civilian casualties, which include infants.

The settlement activities in the occupied territories violate international humanitarian law, including the Geneva Conventions, and exacerbate incidents of violence in the region. The continuing practice of administrative detentions is another factor that exacerbates the situation in the occupied territories.

Movement restrictions in and out of Gaza continue to be a major problem for the economy and welfare of the people of Palestine. Restrictions on imports and exports are stifling economic growth. The continuing exploitation of natural resources in the occupied territories in violation of international humanitarian law has a negative impact on the rights of the Palestinian people.

My delegation calls for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. The ongoing settlement activities are illegal under international law, and the blockade of the Gaza Strip is yet another obstacle to

peace. Furthermore, settlers in the occupied Syrian Golan enjoy disproportionate benefits in terms of water and agricultural resources. Agricultural expansion and the exploitation of natural and agricultural resources in the area continues unabated.

Both parties to the conflict must create the environment needed to facilitate peace. There is an urgent necessity for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories and desist from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice.

We recognize the security needs of Israel. The indiscriminate attacks against Israeli civilians will lead to a counterproductive cycle of violence. We urge both parties to respect international humanitarian law and exercise the utmost restraint for the sake of the safety of civilians and for the greater goal of peace.

It is important to remain engaged in seeking a just and durable solution to the situation in the Middle East. Sri Lanka supports the implementation of General Assembly resolutions on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

We are encouraged that, despite decades of disappointment, the people of Palestine have resolutely sustained their spirit and strength of purpose in order to obtain their legitimate rights, having prevailed over the considerable challenges facing them. We hope that the Palestinian people will work together to preserve national unity. That is imperative for the creation of a fully sovereign, independent Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Mounzer (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to congratulate you on your friendly country on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for this month.

Yesterday, the Israeli occupation Government held a meeting in the occupied Syrian Golan, which was a grave and very provocative step, one that reflects the fact that Israel is operating outside international law and is flouting the international community and the resolutions of the United Nations, namely and notably, resolution 497 (1981), which considers Israel's decision to impose its laws, authority and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan to be null and void and counter to international law. As the Syrian Arab Republic condemns in the strongest terms possible this aggressive behaviour which threatens to further inflame the region, we also call upon the United Nations and the Security Council to immediately intervene and condemn the holding of that meeting so as to ensure that such violations do not recur.

We were most displeased that the briefing of the Secretary-General this morning did not include a clear condemnation of that step taken by Israel, although nobody doubts that it is illegal and counter to the Charter of the United Nations and United Nations resolutions on the occupied Syrian Golan. We expect the Secretariat to respect the purposes and principles of the United Nations. We expect the Secretariat to clearly and openly condemn such steps. Failing to do so merely sends an ambiguous message to Israel. Either the United Nations condemns or it supports what Israel is doing in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Deluded is he who believes that the crisis obtaining in my country, Syria, will distract us from an inalienable right to recover the occupied Syrian Golan completely — that is, to the pre-1967 border. We stress again that such a right is open to neither negotiation nor bargaining. It has no statute of limitations, and any illegal Israeli practices will not change that right one iota. Proof of this fact is the position of our people in the occupied Syrian Golan, who stressed yesterday that the visit by Netanyahu and his occupation Government to the Golan would in no way change their minds and that, just as other colonizers have been ejected from Syria in the past, the Golan will be cleansed of the Israeli occupation sooner or later.

We stress that Israel will be legally pursued and brought to account for all the violations perpetrated in the occupied Syrian Golan, whether it be settlements, racist policies, the pillaging of the Golan's natural resources, including oil and water, support for terrorist groups in the separation zone, or the arbitrary detention of Syrians under occupation, especially the prisoners Siddqui Al-Maqt, Bashira Mahmoud, Amal Abu Saleh and Iyad Al-Jawhry, in addition to all other violations of international law, the Geneva Conventions and United Nations resolutions.

The United Nations and its States Members bear a historic, legal and moral obligation to end Israeli

occupation of Arab lands and establish an independent Palestinian State with full sovereignty and with Al-Quds as its capital, and to see to the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), of 11 December 1948. However, although many decades have gone by with all the documented accompanying Israeli violations of international law and human rights law, the Security Council has failed to live up to his responsibilities. We have witnessed no serious, genuine moves in that regard. The recent history is known to all, namely, the blind support for Israel by some influential members of the Security Council, which makes Israel believe that it stands above the law, that it will not be held to account. As a result, Israel insists on imposing occupation as a fait accompli, and has persisted in its settler colonialist and racist policies.

We have noted a great increase in settler activity. The size of the area where Israeli settlements have been implanted in the past two decades has increased by more than 182 per cent. The number of settlers has increased by 189 per cent in the same period. According to the latest reports, there are projects to build settler units in the occupied West Bank. In the first four months of this year, the number is three times greater than the number that was recorded in the same period last year.

The situation is no less grave in the occupied Syrian Golan. Israel continues to act there as well in an attempt to entrench its settler policies and its occupation of the Golan through expanding and building new settlements, providing financial incentives to bring in settlers through such projects as "Come to the Golan" or the so-called Farms Project, and, recently, through a plan designed to set up 18 new communities in the occupied Syria Golan. The President of the so-called Golan Regional Council declared that it is now preparing to absorb 1,500 new Jewish families in the Golan settlements.

The settlements do not just constitute a war crime, they are also part of a systematic Israeli policy to impose a fait accompli that will kill any chance of achieving peace in the region, entrench the occupation and destroy any hope of creating a contiguous and viable Palestinian State. Ironically, while some members of the Council say that the settlements are illegal and must end, not one step has been taken to stop the escalation of the settlement campaigns and no serious pressure has been brought to bear on Israel.

Lastly, if we want to retain whatever credibility remains at the United Nations, prevent all chances of war and improve the opportunities for peace in our region, the Organization must stop dealing with the Israeli occupation of Arab lands in such a routine manner, with no serious effort to reach real solutions on the ground. The United Nations, in particular the Security Council, must take measures aimed at ensuring full implementation of the relevant international resolutions on Israel's occupation of Arab land, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981), and must compel Israel to withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967.

We note that every time Israel escalates its aggression against the Palestinian people or in the occupied Syrian Golan, some delegations escalate the misleading language of their statements about Syria, all in an attempt to distract attention from Israel's crimes and reduce international pressure on it. To avoid falling into that cheap trap, I will not use this statement on the situation in the occupied Arab territories to respond to the empty claims that some delegations have made about Syria. We have many ways to refute such claims by countries that support, harbour and arm terrorists, help to spread extremism and destruction in Syria and have sought actively to block any efforts to reach a peaceful settlement of the crisis.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Maldives.

Mr. Sareer (Maldives): It is an honour to speak before the Security Council today on an issue that is of profound importance not only to the Maldives but also to efforts to achieve international peace and security.

I would like to thank the Chinese presidency of the Council for convening today's quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his dedicated efforts to find a solution to the discordant situation in the Middle East. With the increase in terror and conflict in the region, peace may seem to some a distant if not impossible prospect, but we should envision its achievement as a journey of a thousand miles that must be taken one step at a time.

Let us look at Palestine, a nation embroiled in conflict for decades. As of now, hope is dim for its people. We reiterate our call for a two-State solution, deemed to be the one and only viable way to achieve enduring peace in the region. The Maldives once again

calls for full realization of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, their right to establish their own State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

As the death toll from the conflict in Syria now approaches 500,000 lives, we have witnessed immense suffering among the people on both sides of the conflict. The sheer extent of the loss of human life — the lives of men, women and children — must compel us all to work relentlessly to explore every option for a sustainable solution to peace in Syria. We must seek a political solution for ending the bloodshed that is in line with the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. We would like to underscore the importance of achieving an inclusive political solution in Syria based on the Geneva talks. As such, we urge the United Nations membership to actively contribute to proposing solutions in the hope of finding an avenue to peace.

The situation in Yemen continues to be very worrying, since it also contributes to regional instability. As more ill-fated civilians are caught up in the conflict, we see displaced people fleeing the country for their lives. We must strive to work for peace in Yemen, and in the meantime we must ensure that humanitarian aid reaches all who so desperately need it. The Maldives condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and believes that it should not be associated with any specific religion, race, culture or society. Islam promotes peace and the protection and preservation of life and unity. It also condemns violence. The Maldives does not condone hiding behind religion as a pretext for inflicting terror; it is not a means to a political end.

We see the Middle East as a breeding ground for oppression, hatred and violence, which is the underlying cause of the instability in the region. We need leadership. We need political will. But above all, we need courage — courage from the leaders of the region and leadership from the members of the Council, as well as the international community. We need the tenacity to do what is right and to take the right steps towards creating lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Mr. Begeç (Turkey): The Middle East is witnessing unprecedented challenges. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with its 70 years of history, is a microcosm of what is happening in the region as a whole today.

Since the last open debate in January (see S/PV.7610), hopes for a viable solution to the Palestinian question have continued to fade and the situation on the ground has deteriorated further. We are very concerned about the latest developments. While our immediate priority should be a rapid de-escalation, at the same time we should all be very cognizant of the fundamental cause of the problem, which is the illegal occupation by Israel of East Jerusalem and other Palestinian territories. Israel's continuing occupation and practices violating international law hinder efforts to achieve a permanent solution. The expansion of illegal settlements poses a major obstacle to peace. Israel's denial of Palestinians' right to use natural resources, its perpetration of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and the excessive use of force, its suppression of the right to freedom of association and assembly, its confiscations of land and efforts to undermine the Islamic status and sanctity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif fuel anger among Palestinians, who have been collectively punished for decades. The humanitarian disaster in Gaza, aggravated by the continued imposition of restrictions, further deepens the suffering of the 1.8 million people living in Gaza. Israel should respond to our repeated calls and lift the inhumane blockade.

The current situation is a sombre foreshadowing of what will happen if the prospects for a two-State solution vanish. We all agree that the status quo is unacceptable and unsustainable. In that regard, the thirteenth session of the Islamic Summit Conference, which Turkey hosted in Istanbul on 14 and 15 April, adopted a resolution on Palestine. Furthermore, the Security Council must live up to its primary responsibility for international peace and security, going beyond expressions of condemnation to outline credible and concrete steps for bringing peace and protection to the Palestinians. On the Palestinian side, the need for reconciliation is more relevant than ever. The consistent support and encouragement of the international community is vital in that regard. The establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, continues to be the only viable solution. Turkey's commitment to supporting the Palestinian people to that end will never cease.

What has happened in Syria is by any definition a humanitarian catastrophe, and as such, a colossal stain on our collective human conscience. No modern conflict has been so devoid of respect for international norms.

Turkey continues to shoulder more than its fair share of the burden of the ongoing devastation. We are extremely concerned about the humanitarian and security impacts of the crisis, which constitute a major national security threat to us. The current chaos that has been created in the northern part of Syria has played into the hands of terrorists, targeting our citizens as well. Just today, rockets fired from Syria hit the Turkish border town of Kilis and killed four people. In addition, we are once again faced with the risk of a new wave of refugees, which has been triggered by the latest regime offensive in Aleppo.

We are at a critical turn in Syria. The third round of negotiations in Geneva has just started. That round should produce a concrete outcome. The regime should be pressured to talk about the essence of the matter, which is political transition. The political process should lead to a transition period with concrete timelines, a new constitution and elections. A transitional governing body with full executive powers should be established. In the meantime, the Council must ensure the implementation of all the measures set out in its own resolutions. Unfortunately, the agreement on the cessation of hostilities has become more fragile owing to the systematic violations on the part of the regime and its allies. Similarly, humanitarian access continues to be hindered by the regime. The removal of medical and surgical items from convoys continues. The United Nations is unlikely to reach its targets for the end of April in terms of the number of civilians needing assistance in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. The lack of progress in those areas could jeopardize the Geneva negotiations.

Another danger facing the process is the efforts to intervene in the opposition delegation. The high negotiations committee, as one of the two negotiating parties, remains engaged in the political process despite efforts to compromise its integrity. Non-intervention by third parties to the composition of the opposition negotiation team is a must for the credibility and sustainability of the process. Attempts to dilute and weaken the opposition will only harm the process. The current tragedy will not end unless the people of Syria have a legitimate Government that truly represents their will and enjoys their full consent.

I would like to conclude my remarks on two positive notes. With regard to Libya, we welcome the arrival and assumption of duties by the Presidential Council in Tripoli on 30 March. Turkey's support for that crucial step was demonstrated by the visit of our special representative to Tripoli on 4 and 5 April, which was the first international visit to the Presidential Council at its headquarters. We recently hosted Mr. Sarraj, President of the Presidential Council, on the occasion of thirteenth Islamic Summit in Istanbul. His participation contributed to the visibility of the Council. We are also ready to host the Ministerial Conference on International Support to Libya, as was decided in Rome in March 2014. Turkey will continue to support Libya.

I would also like to express our support for the start of the cessation of hostilities in Yemen. We hope that the ceasefire will be observed and that the peace talks to be held under the auspices of the United Nations in Kuwait will succeed.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Gunnarsson (Iceland): Allow me to thank the Chinese presidency of the Security Council for having organized this quarterly debate on the situation in the Middle East, including on Israel and Palestine.

The region of the Middle East is witnessing an unprecedented series of conflicts and crises, inflicting suffering on millions of civilians. The international community, led by the Council, is addressing those crises in all their urgency, from Syria to Libya and to Yemen. Iceland praises the countries in region that are hosting such a large number of refugees and is contributing new funds to assist countries in the region dealing with refugee crisis.

As has been observed, we live in an age when wars have no winners, only losers. Broad support has been expressed for highlighting prevention and political solutions in the conclusions of the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (see S/2015/446) and the Secretary-General's report (S/2015/682) on their implementation. We urge the Security Council to refocus its preventative and political powers on the oldest conflict in the Middle East. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a primary example in which decisive action by the Security Council and the international community is needed to prevent further degeneration of the situation. The simmering nature of that conflict is in danger of moving to a boil. The spate of violent attacks against Israeli civilians continues, with the death of 30 innocent Israeli civilians in recent months. That is unacceptable, as is the targeting of any other innocent civilians. Of deep concern as well are

the killings by Israeli security forces of a large number of Palestinians in relation to the spate of attacks, raising questions of due process and the excessive use of force. Israeli security forces have killed approximately 180 Palestinians since last September. Al-Haram Al-Sharif has remained quiet in recent months. We would encourage all parties involved to make sure that it continues to do so. Action to prevent further conflict is urgent.

First, it is urgent to defend the only clear course to sustainable peace, the two-State solution. Israel continues with illegal settlements, land appropriation and punitive demolitions, despite international condemnation. Those actions are in breach of international law. They also seriously threaten the viability of the two-State solution. Iceland urges the Security Council to go beyond the words of condemnation expressed by individual Council members and to take action as a body to send a clear signal to the Israeli authorities that settlements are unacceptable. If we are all as serious about the two-State solution as we say we are, the Security Council must defend it.

Secondly, the international community needs to do more to lend impetus to the search for peace. Iceland welcomes the launch by France of an international support group and the call for a peace conference. In the search for peace, we should not forget the huge potential that exists in involving women on all sides.

Thirdly, ways need to be found to re-establish trust among the parties. That is principally the responsibility of leaders on both sides, who need to be open to creative and innovative solutions. But the international community, led by the Security Council, should search for ways to bring a sense of hope and a horizon of security for the Palestinians and for Israel. That should include looking at measures to establish international protection.

Fourthly, the situation in Gaza needs to be normalized as part of a preventative approach. The firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel is totally unacceptable. The authorities on the ground are responsible for preventing such action. Israeli responses should be proportionate. But if Gaza is not to become a breeding ground for radicalization, then reconstruction must be accelerated and the Strip's isolation lifted.

Iceland condemns all acts of violence against civilians. We believe that the security Council must take firm action to safeguard the path to peace and the two-State solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We also believe that broader international involvement is now necessary to break the impasse, and we welcome the French initiative.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Nguyen (Viet Nam): I join previous speakers in thanking the Chinese presidency for convening this important open debate. My thanks also go to the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning.

Viet Nam aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Constructive dialogue, negotiation and the employment of other peaceful means are the only realistic way to settle international disputes. That is particularly true for the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. Viet Nam advocates the peaceful settlement of the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, aiming at achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution and ensuring the legitimate interests of all the parties concerned. Viet Nam supports the two-State solution with a vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition.

We are therefore extremely alarmed by the most recent report of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Middle East Peace Process, which highlights that the current negative trends on the ground are imperilling the viability of a two-State solution. We are deeply concerned about the recent complicating developments in the region, in particular the latest round of violence, which has cost hundreds of lives. We feel heavy-hearted at seeing the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the West Bank and Gaza and the plight of millions of Palestinians. Viet Nam calls for an end to all acts of violence. We urge Israel to immediately halt illegal settlement activities, land confiscations and the construction of the separation wall, and to strictly abide by international, humanitarian law and human rights law. We appeal to all the parties concerned to uphold their determination to resolve the conflict through negotiations and to refrain from any acts of violence and hostility that escalate tensions. It is essential that priority be given to the mitigation of the pain and

hardship of the Palestinian people, who have suffered for many decades.

Viet Nam has always supported the struggle of the Palestinian people for their fundamental rights, especially the sacred right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State. We call for an early resumption of negotiations between the parties concerned and welcome renewed efforts by the United Nations, the Quartet, the League of Arab States and regional countries to help promote the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on all core issues, with a view to achieving just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Kazakhstan.

Mr. Abdrakhmanov (Kazakhstan): I thank the Chinese presidency for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, which compels us to take urgent action, without which the present tensions could destabilize global security. We also thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

Our world and the Middle East are once again in danger, and the risks cannot be underestimated. It is with that in view that President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan presented a new security paradigm document entitled "Manifesto: The World. The 21st Century" at the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit, held recently in Washington, D.C. The manifesto is significant as it announces a momentous stand on the issue of war and peace. To implement it, he proposed the establishment of a global coalition of States for peace, stability, trust and security, under the auspices of the United Nations. The common task of the coalition for the next decade should be to end wars and conflicts, including in the Middle East.

The Head of my State underlines that a world without conflicts requires the removal of injustice, which is its root cause. It is obvious that barriers to trade and development have to be lifted, while the principles of international law must be reaffirmed and respected by all countries. Those steps should be completed, President Nazarbayev urges, by the time the United Nations celebrates its centenary. In addition, the President warns that

> "In the twenty-first, century humankind must take decisive steps towards demilitarization. We will not have another chance."

All of those approaches are quite relevant to the situation in the Middle East. It is clear that tensions in the Middle East also gravitate around the Palestinian issue. We realize that the two-State solution, the recognition of the Palestinians' right to self-determination and the creation of an independent State of Palestine, peacefully coexisting with Israel within the pre-1967 borders, are the only means of durable peace. We also stand for promoting Palestine's full-fledged membership in the United Nations and encourage Israeli and Palestinian leaders to demonstrate a political commitment to reach a historic peace agreement.

Kazakhstan fully supports the Syrian peace process within the Geneva III peace talks and resolution 2254 (2015). We call on Member States to endorse the measures of the Secretary-General, the Arab League and the International Syria Support Group to find viable solutions. As our input, Kazakhstan hosted in Astana in 2015 two rounds of Syrian consultations, which were attended by the leaders of different opposition groups and representatives of Syrian ethnic and religious minorities.

By setting an example in Central Asia, the Government of Kazakhstan fully endorses the long-standing proposal of establishing in the Middle East a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Establishing such a zone is dictated by its pivotal role in ensuring both regional and global security. Once again, we call upon all interested parties to exert political will, understanding and trust to overcome the different standpoints and to speedily establish such a zone.

Furthermore, at the initiative of my country and other partners, under the auspices of the United Nations and the President of the General Assembly, a high-level dialogue, entitled "Religions for Peace", will convene on 6 May to demonstrate the power of religious unity against the destructive nature of terrorism and violent extremism.

At the recent thirteenth Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, held less than a week ago in Istanbul, the leadership of Kazakhstan, together with the host country, initiated the process of Islamic reconciliation as a new paradigm of relations in the Muslim world, with the aim of reaching a peaceful settlement of disputes and strengthening the unity of the Islamic Ummah. We therefore call on the leadership of

all countries in the region to take the necessary measures to prevent further escalation of sectarian tensions.

In conclusion, we reiterate Kazakhstan's commitment to join the multilateral effort to ensure peace in the Middle East.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Thailand.

Mr. Plasai (Thailand) (*spoke in French*): The Kingdom of Thailand shares the concern of the international community on the issue of the alarming escalation of violence in several cities in Israel and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which erupted in October last year with no sign of ending. We therefore commend China's initiative to convene this debate, and we thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

As a friend of both Israel and Palestine, we reaffirm our strong support for a two-State solution, with a vision of the Israelis and the Palestinians living side by side in peace, harmony and prosperity. However, the ongoing violence and the absence of genuine political dialogue have dimmed the prospects for such a solution. It is therefore a high priority for all stakeholders and the international community to revitalize the peace process, starting by promoting an atmosphere conductive to a resumption of dialogue. As our contribution to this debate, allow me to highlight the following points.

First, as a prerequisite for future negotiations, we must de-escalate the situation on the ground and end violence. Incitement and hate speech, coupled with unhelpful rhetoric, have led to confrontations and inflamed violence. We urge all the parties concerned to exercise maximum restraint and to refrain from any provocative acts. The sanctity of all holy sites must be respected and safeguarded. All attempts to alter the status quo at those sites, including Jerusalem and Hebron, must cease immediately.

Secondly, the ongoing settlement activities and home demolitions in the occupied territories are most worrisome and have caused the massive displacement of people. That practice has heightened tensions and undermined the possibility of a resumption of the peace process. Therefore, we urge strict implementation of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions in that regard.

Thirdly, we are particularly concerned about the dire humanitarian situation and the deterioration of the living conditions of more than 1 million people affected by the long-standing conflict, including the Palestinian refugees and prisoners. We stress the need for all parties to respect international humanitarian law and to ensure unimpeded access for all to humanitarian assistance. We stress as well that there is an urgent need to rebuild public facilities and the basic infrastructure necessary for better livelihoods and economic development. In particular, we join the international call for the lifting of the Gaza Strip blockade to allow the resumption of normal economic activities there.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our continued support for the tireless efforts of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. We also commend the countries of the region and beyond for their generosity and contributions to assist millions of Palestinians affected by the conflict, and we will continue to work closely with the international community to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the region.

The conflict has been at the top of the Council's agenda for decades. More than 200 resolutions have been adopted, but the situation on the ground remains alarming. The Council must live up to its responsibilities and address this issue in a more efficient manner so as to bring about peace and security and ensure the safety and well-being of the peoples of the region.

To conclude, we reiterate our firm conviction that a two-State solution is the best path to peace. We must intensify our efforts to break through the political impasse and reinvigorate the peace process. Thailand urges all parties to make a genuine commitment to rebuilding trust and confidence and to working together towards a just and lasting solution through peaceful means.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): We wish warmly to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting, and we should like also to thank the Secretary-General for the comments he made this morning. We endorse the statements made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The various challenges facing the world require that the parties to conflict respect international law and international humanitarian law and work to ease

tensions, which have had disastrous consequences for international peace and security. The aim of the Security Council is a comprehensive and just peace throughout the world, including the Middle East. To that end, we must halt Israel's violations and illegal practices by putting an end to the occupation and the settlement policy as well as to the crimes perpetrated by Israeli settlers, bringing the perpetrators to justice. All illegal actions must stop, including those targeting holy sites, the killing of and detention of Palestinians, the confiscation of their land and the destruction of their homes.

Resolving the Palestinian question can come about only on the basis of internationally accepted norms, namely, the two-State solution and the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian State on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with an Israeli State, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolution 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Arab Peace Initiative, the return of refugees, respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the end of the Israeli occupation of all occupied Palestinian lands.

Any attempt to impose a policy of fait accompli on the occupied Syrian Golan Heights represents not only a breach of international law and resolution 497 (1981) and the relevant General Assembly resolutions, but is also null and void, can have no legal consequence and undermines efforts to bring about peace in the Middle East.

Everyone recognizes the fact that peace can be achieved only if the Palestinians regain their inalienable rights to life, safety, self-determination and dignified living conditions in their own independent State. It is up to the Council to take the steps necessary to implement those resolutions and bring about peace by taking all measures necessary to provide international protection to the Palestinian people and to launch credible negotiations on all aspects of a final solution, in order to bring to an end the Israeli occupation of all occupied Arab territories, put a total and immediate stop to all settlement activity, lift the Gaza blockade, and rebuild all that was destroyed by the Israeli war machine.

Qatar is fully convinced of the importance of the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and of the positive impact thereof. We have therefore promised to provide $1 billion in aid towards the reconstruction of Gaza. In fulfilment of that promise, we have already built 1,060 housing units in Sheikh Hamid bin Khalifa Al-Thani city, in Gaza, and work on 1,200 other units is under way. We have also built a hospital and carried out 45 domestic road projects.

Regarding Syria, despite the efforts deployed by the international community, represented by the International Syria Support Group, and Council resolution 2268 (2016), the Syrian regime continues to carry out violations and attacks against civilians and civilian targets. It continues to carry out massacres, including that of Deir al-Asafir, in which dozens of people were killed, including children. Civilian facilities were clearly targeted there. It also continues to hamper humanitarian convoys and to block access to the various areas under its control, which causes great difficulties for United Nations personnel.

The only way to put a lasting end to the violence is through the full implementation of resolution 2254 (2015), which reaffirms that the only lasting solution to this crisis will come through an inclusive, Syrian-led political process, so as to achieve the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people fully to implement the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and enable the creation of a transitional entity, the freeing of prisoners, the lifting of the blockade and access for humanitarian convoys.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bahrain.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to thank you, Mr. President, for having convened this meeting and to thank your friendly delegation for your presidency of the Council during this month. I should like also to thank the Secretary-General for his briefing at the beginning of this important debate.

The Kingdom of Bahrain reaffirms its firm stance in support of the Palestinian question and of the efforts made to achieve the aspirations of the Palestinian people, so as to bring about a comprehensive and lasting peace through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The question of Palestine has become more complicated because of the intensification of the settlement process, the siege and the repeated acts of aggression against the Palestinian people and their holy

sites. These illegal actions undermine the prospects for peace and give rise to a climate conducive to the escalation of extremism, hatred and violence, which goes against the values of all religions and those of peaceful societies that promote coexistence.

His Majesty the King of Bahrain, King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, in his address to the thirteenth summit of the Islamic Conference, convened in Turkey, noted that the peace process in the Middle East has become much more complicated and has even reached a standstill because of the persistence of Israeli practices that oppose peace, the expansion of settlement activity, the confiscation of land, the continued siege of the Gaza Strip and the repeated acts of aggression carried out against the Palestinian people and Islamic shrines, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The King of Bahrain rejects and condemns such Israeli practices and calls upon the international community to put an end to them, as they have undermined the peace process and promoted hatred and terrorism in the region. His Majesty stressed the importance of reviving the peace process on the basis of international law and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The challenges are daunting, but our stance remains firm, especially concerning the right of the Palestinian people to build their independent State on their national territory, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Sincere efforts to find a just, comprehensive and lasting solution of the situation in the Middle East should be based on ending the illegal Israeli occupation of Arab territories by Israel, including the Syrian Golan, lifting the illegal blockade against Gaza and the complete withdrawal of Israel from the remaining Lebanese territory, according to relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, resolutions of the Arab Peace Initiative and decisions by the Quartet, as well as on finding a solution that would ensure the return of Palestinian refugees to their homeland, in line with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

In conclusion, we call upon the international community to take all the measures necessary to provide international protection for the Palestinian people and to end the Israeli occupation of all Arab territories so as to achieve lasting and comprehensive peace. We also stress the need to intensify efforts in support of our Palestinian brothers and their aspirations to achieve their inalienable rights.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): We convey our appreciation to the Chinese presidency for convening this open debate. It is somewhat reassuring that the Palestinian question is being discussed in the Security Council at certain intervals against the backdrop of its continued inability to act on this seminal concern for the maintenance of international peace and security

My delegation aligns itself with the statements made today by the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and by representative of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

The overriding message is that the world expects the Council to act in a determined, visible and sustained manner to find a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question. The continued occupation of Palestinian territories, the systematic human rights violations, the indiscriminate attacks against civilians and the expansion of illegal settlements by Israel, the occupying Power, constitute an affront to the values and principles that the Organization stands for. The Council must demonstrate its resolve to address the Palestinian question as a matter of urgency. Immediate priority must be given to ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people, who have been suffering for decades.

The continued breaches of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territories have given rise to an egregious culture of impunity. In the absence of any international accountability or sanctions, the occupying Power continues to kill Palestinian citizens, especially youth and children, imprisoning and abusing scores of Palestinians in its detention centres and injuring and displacing thousands of Palestinian families through its construction and expansion of illegal settlements. It is obvious that the policy of settlements and the construction of the wall in and around occupied East Jerusalem are being deliberately pursued in order to fundamentally change the character, status and demography of the occupied Palestinian territories. That will only serve to indefinitely postpone the Middle East peace process, and thus to destabilize the prospects for a two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders.

The Council has a moral obligation to prevail upon Israel to immediately halt its illegal settlement

regime in the occupied Palestinian territories, lift the blockade in the Gaza Strip and put an end to all forms of occupation. Immediate priority must be given to ensuring international protection for the Palestinian people, who have been suffering for decades from Israel's policy of collective punishment.

We have stated a number of times here — and we will continue to do so — that the continued injustice around the Palestinian question remains at the root of a number of scourges that bedevil international peace and security. Among a host of potential scenarios, the resolution of the Palestinian question will help dry up the ideological reservoir that many international terrorist and violent extremist groups tend to draw on. The moral and ethical issues involved in the Palestinian question need to be unequivocally upheld in order to defeat the twisted and corrosive messaging used by violent extremists to serve their own vested agenda.

In line with our constitutional commitment, the Government and the people of Bangladesh maintain unwavering support for the just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent, viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel. Our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has consistently articulated this message in her annual addresses to the General Assembly.

We continue to urge all key actors to remain seized of efforts to pursue a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question, consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions and in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and the principle of land-for-peace. In that context, we take this opportunity to reiterate our support for a Council resolution to revive the political efforts aimed at achieving the desired two-State solution and the convening of an international conference to address the multidimensional aspects of the Palestinian question in a focused, structured and holistic manner.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Atlassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and to commend your initiative in organizing this open debate to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, during China's presidency of the Security Council this month. This is a clear sign of your country's commitment to accord the subject the importance it deserves under the current circumstances.

My country notes with deep concern the unprecedented deterioration of the situation in Palestine at a time when the international community has shifted its attention to other developments. Despite the importance of those new developments, the question of Palestine should be the focus of attention by the international community, not only because it is a central issue for the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims all over the world, but because it is one that concerns all peace-loving people and advocates for peace across the globe.

The settlement of the situation in the Middle East hinges on the solution of the Palestinian question, which is the central question and the key to the resolution of all issues in the region. Any delay in finding a just and lasting solution for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, would complicate the issue at the expense of Palestinian patience. For the Palestinian people are pinning their hopes on peace and and looking forward to the fulfilment of their aspirations.

The Kingdom of Morocco, whose Head of State, His Majesty King Mohammed VI, chairs the Al-Quds Committee, feels the pain of the Palestinians in general and is pained at the situation in Jerusalem given the continued deterioration of the state of affairs in Palestine as a result of the Judaization, the continued policy of building settlements, the forcible transfer of people and repeated attacks against the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and the worshippers. The impasse that international efforts reached in this area has complicated all potential solutions.

The international community now has the duty to use all its efforts and innovative methods in order to bring back the Palestinians and Israelis to the negotiating table, not for the sake of negotiations but to achieve the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian State. Such negotiations should be based on good faith, according to pre-established timelines in order to restore confidence between the parties, according to the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. His Majesty King Mohammed VI, in his capacity as Chair of the Jerusalem Committee, in his address to the fifth

Extraordinary Summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, held in Jakarta last month, supports all serious initiatives aimed at ending the Israeli occupation and to achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Morocco also supports the initiative of France to find a solution to the Palestinian question, including through the convening of an international conference. During the thirteenth session of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which was hosted by Turkey last week, the King of Morocco said,

> "We can only stress our support for the invitation of our brother, President Mahmoud Abbas of the State of Palestine, to convene an international peace conference aimed at ending the Israeli occupation, as that is a basic step towards ending the catastrophic and volatile situation in Palestine and restoring the hope that a peaceful, just and lasting peace on the basis of the two-State solution can be reached. We also support the French initiative, which aims at bringing the Israeli and Palestinian parties to the negotiating table and at ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, according to a clear timeline."

The King also called for the adoption of an approach that would merge political actions and diplomatic efforts, while highlighting legitimate rights and work in the field. The Holy Jerusalem Endowment Trust Fund would implement specific projects aimed at supporting the inhabitants of Jerusalem and saving the city that is at the core of the conflict. In that regard, because Morocco remains committed to supporting work on the ground that benefits Palestinians, we have assumed responsibility for more than 85 per cent of the Trust Fund's budget in order to continue the implementation of projects on Palestinian territory.

The only sound and viable path towards the resolution of the Palestinian question is not one of war, bloodshed and the killing of innocent civilians. Rather, the parties should return to the negotiating table in good faith within clear-cut parameters in order to achieve the solution of two States coexisting in peace, harmony, security and cooperation. Morocco continues to base its position with regard to the Palestinian conflict on the Arab Peace Initiative and the principles of the Madrid terms of reference, which seek to achieve peace through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the borders of June 1967.

In conclusion, we would like to stress that the international community is called upon more than ever before to revive the peace process with a specific timeline and on the basis of the norms and principles set forth in United Nations resolutions. Morocco stands ready to fully participate in all efforts and initiatives aimed at advancing the peace process with a view to reaching a settlement that consolidates peace and stability in the region.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Sir, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to extend thanks to the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for the briefing he presented at the beginning of this meeting on his recent visit to a number of countries, including Tunisia, and the most recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Once again we meet, as we have done for decades, while the Israeli settlers and the forces of the occupation continue their daily acts of aggression and violations against the unarmed Palestinian people and their Christian and Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem, in particular Al-Aqsa Mosque, in blatant violation of international legitimacy, charters and laws.

The occupation authorities continue their settlement campaign despite the growing rejection of it by the international community. We are all in agreement that such a campaign constitutes a violation of international law. There is no longer any doubt that Israel continues to impose a policy of fait accompli in order to gain more time to change the status quo by force and impede any attempts or initiatives aimed at achieving peace based on the two-State solution. That solution has been undermined by the settler colonialist expansion. It is therefore time for the international community, in particular the Council, to assume full responsibility for bringing an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory and the Israeli practices against the Palestinian people.

We are all in agreement that both the occupation and the practices are illegal and illegitimate. It is time to effect a genuine change with regard to how the

Council deals with the question of Palestine. Today, there is no option for diffusing the tension and ending the continued turbulence other than to put an end to the unprecedented settler colonialism and occupation, which is the crux of the problem. There must be a serious and responsible movement, before it is too late, with the goal of arriving at a peaceful, just and comprehensive solution that guarantees the Palestinian people their right to establish a sovereign viable, independent and contiguous State on their territory — which has been occupied since 1967 — with East Jerusalem as its capital.

My delegation supports any genuine effort that would contribute to achieving that goal, and therefore welcomes the initiative mentioned this morning by the representative of France. Tunisia also supports the Palestinian request that the United Nations provide international protection for Palestinian civilians within the occupied Palestinian territories in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law. We also reiterate our goal to have the embargo imposed on the Gaza Strip lifted and to secure the delivery of humanitarian assistance to civilians. The success of the process to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East depends on the full withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, as well as the territories still occupied in south Lebanon.

Before concluding, I must express Tunisia's satisfaction at the resumption of negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations in Geneva for the political settlement of the Syrian crisis and at the cessation of hostilities, which was achieved thanks to the laudable efforts of the United States and the Russian Federation. Tunisia hopes that our Syrian brothers will seize this important and historic opportunity and take advantage of the support of the international community, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Staffan de Mistura, and the International Syria Support Group, in order to achieve a political settlement that puts an end to the crisis and violence, preserves the territorial integrity of Syria and promotes societal cohesion in accordance with the aspirations of the Syrian people.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Sarki (Nigeria): At the outset, Nigeria aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representative of the State of Kuwait on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

We wish to thank the Permanent Representative of Namibia for delivering a statement on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We also wish to thank the delegation of China for convening today's debate, which provides an opportunity for reflection on the seemingly intractable situation in the Middle East. Furthermore, we thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his briefing and commend him for the moral voice that he has lent to the search for peace in the Middle East. We welcome his recent visit to the region, during which he met with high-level officials in furtherance of his good-offices efforts.

The surge in the violence and senseless killings in the occupied Palestinian territory, perpetrated by extremists and so well described by previous speakers, is deeply worrying. Fears have been expressed that, if the situation is not contained, there is a possibility of further escalation, with its attendant predictable consequences. The international community must therefore work in a concerted manner to avert another catastrophe in the region.

We condemn the indiscriminate killings in the strongest possible terms. They are unjustifiable. We must avert a scenario where extremists dictate the political agenda, as that could provide fuel to the conflict and complicate the difficult search for peace even further. Provocations and hostile rhetoric must be avoided. The status of all the holy sites must be respected and protected against hostile actions.

Nigeria takes note of the latest report issued by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. We share the concern of the Special Coordinator that the viability of a two-State solution is in danger owing to the negative trends on the ground, including the recent escalation in violence, ongoing settlement activities, demolitions, incitement and the absence of Palestinian unity.

It is evident that a departure from the current crisis and a revival of the peace process are hardly achievable without ending the policy of settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories. We believe that there are a number of specific actions that are necessary in order to foster mutual respect and compromise, build

confidence and pave the way for the realization of the two-State solution. The international community, in particular the Security Council, has the responsibility to constructively address that issue before it is too late.

In that regard, we urge Israel to take concrete steps to freeze all its settlement-related activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The current stalemate in the Middle East peace process is neither ideal nor sustainable. Both sides must take concrete steps to return to negotiations on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Quartet road map, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant agreements between the parties. Nigeria supports the efforts of the international community aimed at establishing an environment conducive to a return to meaningful negotiations on ending the occupation and resolving the long-running conflict.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1) serves to underscore that no one should be left behind in the legitimate expectation of the enjoyment of the right to development for all people. However, it is clear that the Palestinian people will not benefit from that set of goals without a viable land to call their home and country and without a lasting peace to enjoy the fruits of their labour and industry. The Security Council must, as a matter of duty and necessity, ensure that the Palestinian people are not left behind and alienated from the stream of global peace, prosperity and the full enjoyment of liberty, freedom and human rights.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Israel has requested the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Meitzad (Israel): As we sit here today debating, my country is being attacked. In fact, while the Security Council has been deliberating on the situation in the Middle East, we received word of yet another terror attack in Jerusalem. A bus was blown up in downtown Jerusalem, injuring dozens of people, some of them critically. Shockingly enough, the only Council members to even mention the attack in their remarks were Ukraine, Uruguay and the United States. We expect the Council to condemn the attack.

Also, just this morning, the Israel Defence Forces revealed that it had discovered a tunnel from Gaza that reaches into Israeli territory. That terror tunnel, which is hundreds of feet below ground, is equipped with electrical systems and lined with concrete. We have warned time and again that Hamas has been diverting the cement that has been sent in for the reconstruction of homes and schools to rearm and prepare for the next round of conflict. Today we have another piece of concrete proof. This fact was also almost completely ignored.

The tunnel has one purpose and one purpose only: to carry out terror attacks against innocent Israelis. A bus bombing in Jerusalem and terror tunnels out of Gaza have come to light, but in this Chamber it is business as usual. Once again, many in this Chamber focus solely on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but ignore terror against Israel. Some delegations even chose to undermine the credibility of this important platform by presenting false accusations, distorted information and one-sided statements. To those States, and especially those who sit in the Council, like Malaysia and Venezuela, or to Saudi Arabia and others who wish to position themselves as relevant players, I would like to say the following.

You can either continue to falsely blame Israel for all that is wrong in the Middle East in order to serve your narrow, domestic political needs, or you can end the zero-sum-game approach and take a constructive approach instead. It is no surprise when countries like Venezuela and Malaysia, with long histories of suppressing freedom of speech and freedom of expression at home, distort the reality here at the United Nations. They do not let the facts get into the way of the one-sided story.

I would also like to say that I find it odd that Saudi Arabia, a country that has been accused of indiscriminate bombing and war crimes in Yemen, has the audacity to make reckless allegations against others.

Iran and Lebanon once again chose to falsely criticize Israel. Need I remind you, Mr. President, that Iran is the number-one sponsor of terror in the region, whether it be with the Houthis in Yemen or Hizbullah, which is starving people in Madaya, or its recent outrageous plan offering to make payments to Palestinian terrorists? Wherever there is terror or instability in the region, Iran is at the helm. That is the very same Iran that was recently condemned by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for its support of terror.

Turning to Lebanon, a country that has a terror organization, Hizbullah, as an integral part of its Government, the Lebanese Government recently

become the sole champion and protector of Hizbullah, while outside Lebanon that terror group is being condemned for its destabilizing role in the region by the United Nations, the Arab League and the OIC. And yet Lebanon has no shame in criticizing Israel.

To my Palestinian colleagues, I would like to say that there is no other way forward than by direct negotiations. A mere two weeks ago, Prime Minister Netanyahu repeated his call for direct negotiations. He said,

> "I am inviting President Abbas again. I have cleared my schedule this week. Any day he can come, I will be here. My door is always open to those who want to pursue peace with Israel."

We call upon the Palestinians to accept our call for negotiations and fully condemn the incitement and terror against Israelis. We call on them to publicly renounce terror and join us on the path to peace and reconciliation.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): The representative of Malaysia has requested the floor to make a further statement. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Abdul Razak (Malaysia): I take the floor, unfortunately, to respond to the statement made by my colleague from Israel.

First, my delegation categorically rejects the allegations made. They serve no other purpose than to divert the Security Council's attention from the real matter at hand, which is the continuing situation in Palestine, which is under occupation by Israel.

Malaysia's position on Palestine is based on the values and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law, including international human rights law and humanitarian law, as well as the various resolutions of the United Nations, including those of the Security Council. Yet Israel continues to completely and flagrantly disregard international law and disrespects international human rights standards. Israel is in violation of countless resolutions and decisions of the Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and even the International Court of Justice. Its lack of cooperation with United Nations human-rights mechanisms, is described in detail in the latest report (A/HRC/31/73) of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories.

With regard to terrorism, Malaysia's long-standing position is to condemn all acts of terror and the killing of civilians, regardless of whether the victims are Israelis or Palestinians. It is, however, unfortunate that terrorism has become a convenient narrative that Israel uses to portray itself as a victim, cover up its illegal actions and mask its intention to destroy the possibility of a two-State solution. We urge the Israeli delegation to focus its energies on addressing the various concerns raised by my delegation and other Member States today, rather than attempting to divert our attention.

The meeting rose at 6.45 p.m.